

GAY LIBERATION AND SOCIALISM:

Documents From the Discussions on Gay  
Liberation Inside the Socialist Workers  
Party (1970-1973)

Selected, Introduced, and With Commentary  
by David Thorstad



## INTRODUCTION

This booklet contains close to 40 documents from internal discussions on gay liberation within the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) from 1970 to 1973. These documents have never before been published, except for strictly internal SWP use. A total of 104 documents was published during three periods of three months each: the pre-convention discussion of 1971 (Vol. 29; 14 documents); the special literary discussion on gay liberation in 1972 (Vol. 30; 56 documents); and the pre-convention discussion of 1973 (Vol. 31; 34 documents). The documents presented here represent a selection of both the best and the worst of these discussions. I have had to make a selection primarily because of financial considerations: I simply could not afford to publish them all. Many useful or revealing documents have had to be left out. Nevertheless, I have included all major documents, and a number of others in order to provide an accurate overview of what is to my knowledge the only thorough discussion of this question to date in any left-wing organization anywhere in the world.

In addition, I am including in this collection a few other items of interest, such as the analysis of the discussions that I wrote for the Gay Liberator (Dec. 1974-Jan. 1975); in some ways, this article serves as an in-depth introduction to this collection, and I suggest that it be read before a journey through the remainder of the documents is undertaken.

Where possible, I have obtained permission to reprint. Many of the authors are still members or leaders of the SWP, and their permission could not be obtained by someone who is now outside the party. I have not let this deter me, however, for I regard these documents as being of considerable value to the gay liberation movement. In view of the SWP's own failure to make them available to interested persons, I see no alternative but to publish them at my own expense. I have published 100 copies. The sale price of this booklet barely covers my expenses.

This collection is designed to accomplish two things. First, to provide a "feel" for the evolution of the discussions as the party moved from its lifting of the ban on membership of homosexuals in 1970, through its initial efforts to relate somewhat positively to the theoretical and practical challenges raised by the gay liberation movement, to its gradual solidifying of a position on the question and its adoption of its present stance at the convention in August 1973. Second, and most important, to further discussion of crucial theoretical and strategical issues within the gay liberation movement.

I have decided to make these documents available for three reasons. First, the liberal-reformist wing of the gay movement is still the dominant force within it. Yet this wing has contributed nothing whatever to increasing a theoretical understanding of gay oppression and liberation, let alone explaining why the struggle for gay liberation can only be achieved through the destruction of capitalism and its replacement with a truly human society that only socialism can bring about. Second, socialist-minded gays are now seriously trying to grapple with these questions, not only in the



United States, but throughout the world. Third, neither the SWP nor any other left group is doing much of anything to advance the struggle for gay liberation (beyond publishing an occasional pamphlet, running an occasional news article in its press, or carrying an occasional banner in a gay demonstration). However much an improvement this may be over the habit of the Stalinized Communist parties (and their Mao-oid offspring) of dismissing homosexuality as a "product of bourgeois decadence" or something equally stupid, it is a far cry from the essential task of integrating homosexual liberation into the overall struggle of the working class to overthrow capitalism. These documents will shed some light on the difficulties, as well as the necessity, of accomplishing this task.

These documents--especially those from the 1973 pre-convention discussion, during which gay liberationists submitted and fought for a counterresolution to the "memorandum" of the party leadership--often represent the distillation of a sometimes lengthy, involved process of debate, self-criticism, and rewriting. There is certainly an interesting story here--on how gay liberationists arrived at our common positions, on how we hammered out our approach. This story would include the problems we faced in attempting to present our views in oral debate before party units, the sometimes factional approach followed by the secondary party leadership in combatting us, and the way in which some gay comrades rushed to make peace with the party leadership once its "memorandum" had been published. I would hope that this full story could be told some other time. I do not tell it here because my aim in publishing these documents is less to tell the story of the struggle than it is to make important analyses available to a gay movement for which they are still immensely relevant several years after they were written.

I would like to make a couple of brief observations, however. On the role of lesbians in this discussion: Few documents by lesbian comrades were submitted. And none of the lesbians who were in the eye of the party (through activity in the women's or antiwar movements, or who were in a leadership position of some kind) wrote a thing in the discussion. I do not know the explanation for this. A few privately expressed general agreement with the analysis we presented. But when the final votes were taken, all wound up supporting the leadership's position. This abstention on the part of most lesbians accounts for the dearth of documents by lesbians in the present collection.

The party leadership tended to dismiss the question of transvestism as irrelevant to the discussion on gay liberation. I do not believe it was, however. The leadership tried to argue that the SWP did not ban transvestites, but rather that its policy of "dress and decorum" (which really was irrelevant to a discussion on gay liberation) merely restricted transvestite and drag behavior to private moments. This argument was defended as a way of protecting the party from acquiring an "exotic" image. In reality, it was used to exclude any transvestite comrade (of whom several, mostly closeted, came to my attention) from any party function (including socials). This became clear as early as 1971, when I was asked to urge a comrade from the Young Socialist Alliance, the party's youth group, to leave a social at the party convention for being in low drag. I refused; instead, I danced with him as a sign of solidarity. I subsequently learned that he did leave, at the prodding of another gay comrade, more malleable than I. I am including here a document on transvestism because, although I do not agree with everything in it, I believe that the arguments it contains are generally correct. As the discussion



developed, it became clear that the arguments used against transvestites were often exactly the same as those used against gays. The section on "dress and decorum" in the leadership's "memorandum" confirmed this.

It is my sincere hope that my publishing of these documents will contribute toward bringing socialist ideas to the gay liberation movement and a Marxist approach to gay liberation to the revolutionary movement.

David Thorstad  
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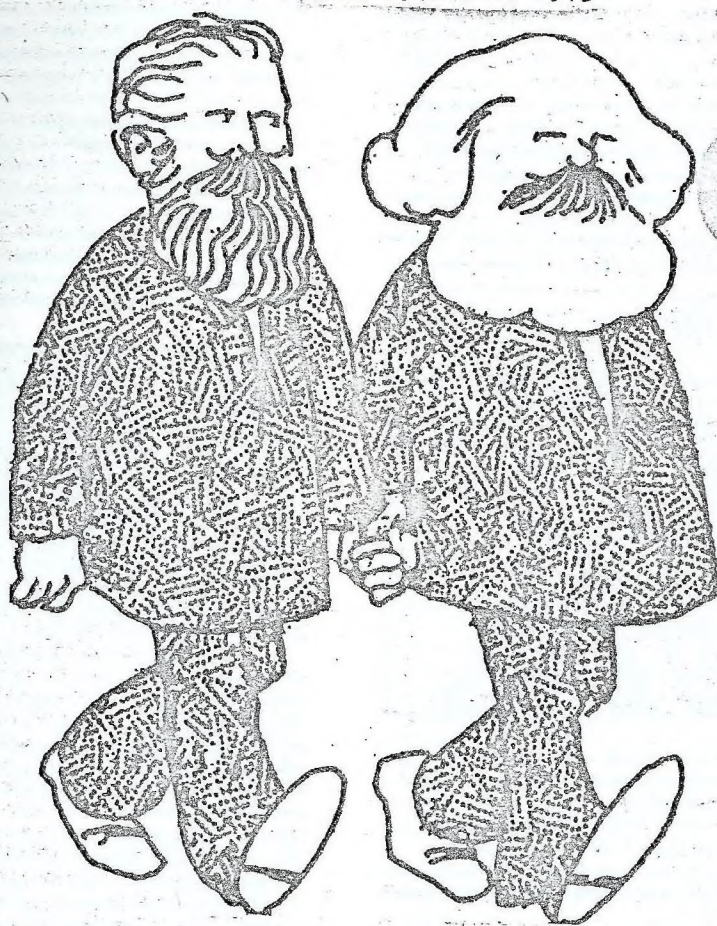
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# Gays

# VS

# SWP

by DAVID THORSTAD

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Many of my friends in the gay movement have urged me to tell why I left the Socialist Workers Party in December 1973. They knew that my reasons hinged on my differences with the position the party adopted on gay liberation at its convention in August 1973, but they wanted to learn the full story of the evolution of the party's position prior to that convention, and of the role that gays played in it. They felt that the gay liberation movement had a right to know the story, that it should be made part of the public record. I agree.

I have three additional reasons for telling the story now. First, I believe that interest in socialist ideas is on the increase within the gay movement. Gay socialists cannot intelligently respond to this interest without some awareness of the facts about the SWP discussion, which, although unprecedented in scope, nevertheless resulted in defeat for those of us who put forward a Marxist, historical-materialist analysis of the relationship between the struggle for gay liberation and the struggle for socialism.

Second, considerable confusion exists among gays as to what is the Marxist approach to the question of homosexuality, gay oppression, and gay liberation. This confusion is compounded by the refusal of socialist groups like the SWP to develop a correct position on the question. It has even given rise to the erroneous charge that the SWP is trying to "take over" the gay movement. In a few cases, this charge appears to have come from outright anti-communist elements who regard Marxism and gay liberation as incompatible, and who would like to keep the gay movement safely within the confines of capitalist politics by creating an atmosphere inhospitable to socialists. More often, the charge has

come from gays who genuinely wonder what the SWP is "up to." Further silence on my part can only help to perpetuate existing confusion.

Finally, gay activists in other countries, who tend more often to be socialist-minded than is the rule in the United States, may find the experience of gays in the SWP instructive in terms of their own relationships to left-wing parties.

## BACKGROUND

The discussion within the SWP on gay liberation cannot be understood apart from the historical contexts that accompanied and immediately preceded it. Briefly, this means going back to the McCarthyite witch-hunt of the early 1950s. Joseph McCarthy, like other right-wing reactionaries who preceded him, attempted to link communism and homosexuality; his campaign was to purge the State Department of communists and homosexuals, often viewed as interchangeable species. One of his main arguments was that homosexuals constituted a "security risk" — they could be blackmailed into giving state secrets to enemies, real or imagined, of American capitalism. So fierce was the anticommunist hysteria whipped up at the time that all leftist groups faced an attrition of their membership that threatened their very existence. Fresh breezes of social criticism would not make their appearance until more than a decade later, with the civil rights and peace movements. Rather than expose and combat the "security risk" argument, the SWP adopted it. It began, in the late sixties, to ban homosexuals from party membership on exactly the same grounds that McCarthy demanded their exclusion from the State Department; and so it introduced into the workers' movement one of the main arguments of the bourgeoisie against homosexuals.

It is ironic, for two reasons, that this argument was used. First, it ignored the fact that homosexuals are subject to the risks of blackmail only so long as they attempt to hide their homosexuality. Yet, by making homosexuality itself the grounds for expulsion or denial of membership, the SWP simply

obliged its homosexual members to continue to conceal their sexual orientation, thereby increasing not diminishing, the dangers of blackmail! Second, the evolution toward an explicit policy banning from membership occurred at precisely the time when new winds of social change were blowing, of which was to develop into the unprecedented storm of the gay liberation movement itself.

Although the SWP never officially adopted a position banning gays from membership, in fact such a policy was applied in some of its branches in the late sixties. The policy was not adopted following democratic discussion or vote, but was simply allowed to take shape under the uncritical eye of leadership and membership alike.

The SWP National Committee first discussed the exclusion of homosexuals from membership at its plenum of February 27-March 1, 1970. There the exclusion was presented as a matter of security designed to protect the party from victimization. It was justified on the same grounds that the use of illegal drugs by party members was prohibited. No one challenged either the policy or the argument in favor of it. In his report on the plenum to the New York branch, Ed Shaw, a top party leader, added his own opinion that the party could not be a "hospital" for people who needed therapy, not membership in a revolutionary organization. I spent the next eight months daily rehearsing a resignation speech that I could not bring myself to make.

At the suggestion of the SWP leadership, the policy was then consciously implemented in the party's youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance whose National Committee went so far as to explicitly adopt such a policy in August 1970.

The SWP was to my knowledge, the only Trotskyist party in the world to have such a policy. And the policy was doomed by its own inner contradictions, which became unbearable with the rise of the present wave of the gay movement in 1969. New

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young recruits to the Trotskyist movement scoffed at the policy, and it quickly became an impediment to recruiting on the campuses, where homosexuality was gaining greater acceptance. On November 13, 1970, the SWP Political Committee decided to abolish it. It did so, however, without coming to grips with the fact that had allowed such a policy to come about in the first place. It never stated that the policy had always been wrong; rather, it rejected it on the purely pragmatic grounds that it "is really not viable in that it creates more real problems for the party than it solves."

Inadequate and lacking in self-criticism though this step was, it was a giant step forward for gays within the party. It made it possible for us to come out and take advantage of a new opening to press for more than mere tolerance, for a truly revolutionary grasp of the dynamic and potential of the gay liberation struggle, for a genuine effort to develop a theory of homosexual oppression and liberation and to link the struggle for gay liberation to the struggle of the working class for socialism in a way never before possible in the history of the working-class movement.

Credit for getting rid of the policy cannot go to gays in the party; we were too busy trying to hide our homosexuality to fight it. Nor can it go to the leadership that had allowed it to develop behind the backs of the party ranks. Rather, it must go to the gay liberation movement itself, which was becoming increasingly noisy and effective. After even capitalist politicians began to be forced to make statements in support of gay rights, it became clear to the SWP leadership that its policy was out of date and had to be scuttled.

## A NEW MOOD

Elimination of the policy was generally welcomed by gay and straight members alike with relief, and occasionally joy. V-signs were flashed in corridors. As gays began to come out, they did so in an atmosphere of exhilaration and excitement, both personal and political, that everyone seemed to share in. Large numbers of "straights" began to freely discover, and act upon, homosexual tastes that had been previously unimaginable. For homosexual members, commitment to socialism took on new meaning: We began to see it not as something separate from, or even antagonistic to, our growing consciousness of oppression, but rather as something inextricably linked to the struggle for liberation from a sexual taboo rooted in the needs of class society. Some of us even understood for the first time that our initial attraction to the socialist movement had itself been prompted by our indignation at the injustice of homosexual oppression under capitalist society.

It was not long before it became obvious that, with the policy gone, the next step for the party would have to be to develop a serious political orientation to the gay liberation struggle.

What followed was a brief period during which a genuine interest was shown by some party leaders in helping the party to orient itself to the gay movement. The party newspaper, *The Militant*, tried to carry articles on gay liberation in each issue. Gay members began to participate in gay demonstrations and groups. The party even helped to actively mobilize support for the statewide demonstration against antigay laws in Albany, N.Y., on March 14, 1971, and for the sizable and militant gay contingent in the giant April 21, 1971, antiwar demonstration in Washington, D.C. It began to hold public forums on Marxism and gay liberation. This period lasted from January through May 1971.

For gays, this was an exhilarating period, during which we sensed that we were participating in a historic process of breaking down hostility on the left to homosexuality, a process that could lead to a revolutionary socialist party of the working class championing the demands of one of the most oppressed layers of capitalist society.

Many gay activists were puzzled by this new interest in gay liberation. But by and large they welcomed it as a sign of the gay movement's potential for undermining social prejudice and winning new adherents to its cause. Some were skeptical, however, and voiced doubt that the process would go very far. As it turned out, the skeptics were right.

The party's involvement had hardly begun when the brakes began to be applied. They were applied in

response to some party leaders in the national center in New York and throughout the country. No significant opposition was expressed among the rank and file, most of whom seemed genuinely interested in continuing the process.

The braking process took a contradictory, but not altogether negative, form. It was contradictory for two reasons. First, divisions existed within the leadership itself on the question of the party's orientation to gay liberation. And second, although the leadership as a whole favored a pullback from the escalating involvement (some temporarily, others permanently), it had to reckon with a rank and file for whom a pullback would seem neither desirable nor justifiable.

The braking process was not altogether negative because it was presented not as a pullback (which it



was), but as a step forward — and this made it possible, for a time, to continue the discussions on gay liberation, though in a different form. From now on, the focus shifted from the gay liberation movement itself to the internal repercussions within the party stemming from the party's brief involvement. This turning inward was to last for more than two years.

The pullback took two forms: a May 25, 1971, decision of the Political Committee that the party conduct a "probe" of the gay liberation movement "for the purpose of gathering information"; and an internal literary discussion of the gay liberation movement and the party's orientation to it.

## THE PROBE

The stated purpose of the "probe" was to gather information "about the present size of the gay liberation movement, its geographical spread, the history of its development, the specific nature of the different gay liberation groups, the demands which have been raised by the gay liberation organizations, the political positions of the different currents within the gay liberation movement, the positions of our opponents concerning it, and its relationship to the developing radicalization." Nothing wrong with that — on the surface. After all, why shouldn't a Marxist party know the facts about a movement it intended to participate in? Why shouldn't it know just what it was getting into?

The problem is that the "probe" had a different purpose. Most, if not all, of the information it purportedly sought to gather was already known; the party had, in fact, been conducting a "probe" during the previous five months, though it didn't call it that. The real purpose of the "probe" was to place in firm control a party leadership that, while divided on the question, was nevertheless increasingly adapting to tendencies within it that wanted not to get into the gay movement, but to get out of it. This became clear at the party convention the following August, when the "probe" was ended, but no proposal whatsoever for party intervention into the gay movement was forthcoming from the party leadership!

I was a delegate to that convention. In a gay workshop, I spoke out against this blatantly irresponsible failure of the leadership to provide leadership. I said that I could not vote for the motion to end the "probe" because it contained no perspective for continuing involvement in gay liberation. Before the convention vote, however, I was assured by Barry Sheppard, the leadership's spokesman on the gay question, that the leadership did not want to

pull back from the gay movement, but to continue the kind of newspaper coverage, forums, active support for gay demonstrations, and so on, that had marked the party's orientation during the first few months of 1971. On that basis, I urged a vote for: the motion, and expressed faith in the leadership.

If I had known then what I knew later, and even then suspected, I would never have done so. To his credit, one party leader who knew better, Harry Ring, refused to vote at all on such a preposterous motion. Yet even that was a sign of weakness; it offered no concrete alternative to the do-nothing approach of the leadership. The pro-intervention forces had been caught off guard. We had allowed the center of gravity to shift from the party ranks to the leadership, which henceforth could call the shots on the basis of privy discussion and agreement at the top, with no input from below, and in complete disregard for the opinions of the gay members themselves.

## THE LITERARY DISCUSSION

The convention also approved a motion from the National Committee to organize a literary discussion, "following the convention." The discussion was to lead to "a decision" by "a plenum of the National Committee." Most delegates who voted for this motion probably thought, as I did, that the discussion would begin soon after the convention. Actually, it did not begin until May 1972 — nine months later. And the "decision" of the National Committee did not come until April 29, 1973 — nearly one more year later. And it was a rotten decision — but more on that later.

The literary discussion was fruitful. Nearly fifty documents were contributed, on a whole spectrum of topics: antigay laws throughout the world, the relationship between gay liberation and the class struggle, transvestism, attitudes within the left toward homosexuality, economic exploitation faced by gays, the party's increasingly apparent pullback from the gay movement, the history of the gay movement in the US, the relationship between women's liberation and gay liberation, the Marxist approach to the question of sexual oppression and the antihomosexual taboo, proposals that the party intervene in the gay movement, and proposals that it not intervene.

This discussion was historic. Never before had a socialist party engaged in such a thorough and creative discussion of the issue of homosexuality and gay liberation, making the contributions available to all of its members and co-thinkers on an international scale. I feel that this discussion should be regarded as part of the history of the gay liberation movement. It deserves some day to be published.

The literary discussion served two purposes. First, it offered the leadership the kind of "cover" it needed before moving to relegate its earlier position of active support to gay liberation to a file marked "positions taken but best forgotten."

Second, it further braked party involvement in the gay movement, while simultaneously giving the impression that involvement would result from it. Those who, like myself, wanted such involvement regarded it as a vehicle for discrediting those who did not (all the arguments seemed to be on our side), and those who did not want any involvement either kept silent or regarded the discussion as a sign that the leadership had placed a question mark over involvement.

None of the outright opponents to involvement in the central party leadership wrote a word in the discussion. (Their opposition was real, but it remained "unofficial" because they would not put it down in black and white for the whole party to see.) Apparently they felt, correctly as it turned out, that their opposition had a better chance of prevailing if they kept silent. So much for democratic and open debate — heretofore a hallmark of Bolshevik democracy.

One party leader from San Francisco, Nat Weinstein, did speak out openly in the literary discussion against involvement. It is worth capsulizing the points he made for two reasons. First, the general reaction they aroused at the time among the ranks was a mixture of horror and embarrassment. And second, most of them were to subsequently find their way into the official position put forward by the party leadership, and adopted by the 1973 convention.



Weinstein argued that workers, women, and oppressed nationalities faced more severe oppression under capitalism than gays because they had no "closed" avenue of escape from overt oppression. "His view that the closet was a refuge from oppression, rather than a manifestation of it, made a mockery of the gay liberation movement's appeal to gays to come 'out of the closets and into the streets' — a necessary first step toward building any gay movement."

He also mechanically regarded gay liberation merely as a struggle of a fixed behavioral minority ("gay people") against "psychological oppression," not as a struggle against an exclusive heterosexual norm that stunted the sexuality of everybody, including straights. And he belittled this struggle as lacking the "size, weight, force, history, tradition, international connection, class connection, etc." of, say, the struggle of oppressed nationalities for self-determination.

He warned that too close an identification with gay liberation would give the party an "exotic image" and threaten its ability to lead the working class: "Undue emphasis on minor issues can give an organization like ours an exotic image, erecting barriers that cannot be justified by subsequent historical development." Workers, he claimed to have discovered, were too tired anyway to worry about sex; he thereby suggested that gay liberation could only appeal to the upper classes of society (a stupid rehash of the Stalinist notion that homosexuality was a product of "bourgeois decadence" or a petty-bourgeois phenomenon).

He called upon the party to "cleanly put an end to this chapter of the party's development." Yet, he added: "Of course, we should continue our position of unconditional support to the struggles of homosexuals for full democratic rights, including full civil and human rights, and against all the forms of discrimination and oppression they suffer under capitalism." With "support" like that who needs opponents?

The central leadership proceeded throughout subsequent discussions to give the impression that it rejected Weinstein's barbaric point of view. Yet at the same time, it knew that he was also speaking for some top party leaders themselves, who preferred to hide behind a cloak of official silence. And so, when it finally reached its long-awaited "decision" on gay liberation ten months later, it incorporated much of Weinstein's "analysis" into what it called a "Memorandum on the Gay Liberation Movement," approved on April 29, 1973, and published in May.

## THE 1973 DEBATE

Everything came to a head with the pre-convention discussion prior to the August 1973 convention.\* By now it had become clear that it might be necessary for the pro-gay liberation forces to organize an open struggle against the party leadership. And when the leadership finally published its memorandum, that is what we did.

## THE MEMORANDUM

The memorandum was a repository of contradictions, vague formulations, and outright intimidation. It was intended to justify both the party's earlier position of supporting gay liberation and the pullback from that position. It contained things that were good, and things that were bad. It provided something for just about everybody; those who wanted the party to participate in gay liberation could vote for it because it held out the faint possibility of participation (though without the correct analysis), and those who opposed participation could vote for it because it nowhere specifically called for participation. It was a wretched document.

The SWP appears unwilling to publish it, or even to report its contents to the readers of its newspaper, and for good reason: it would stir up such a storm of criticism within the gay movement that the party would no longer be able to pose as the "unconditional" supporter of gay liberation that it claims to be. Yet the fact that it has not been published makes

it difficult to discuss it at any length in this article. Briefly, here is what it said.

1. It reaffirmed a position of "unconditional support to the struggles of homosexuals for full democratic rights, including full civil and human rights, and against all the forms of discrimination and oppression they suffer under capitalism." This looks good on paper, and it is a step forward from the days when gays were banned from membership. But in the absence of any perspective for concretely demonstrating the professed "support," it does not go very far. Since the 1973 convention, the party's "support" to gay liberation has tended to be little more than an occasional repetition of this position in some of its election propaganda.

2. It rejected "all forms of bourgeois prejudice against gay people," including the notion that gays are sick, but added that "the party does not and should not take a stand on the nature or value of homosexuality." This last point involved an implicit rejection of the slogan "Gay is Good" (which has subsequently been stricken from the party's vocabulary) and of scientific evidence, which unquestionably shows that homosexual behavior is a natural form of human sexuality. Two reasons were advanced for refusing to take such a stand.

First, it warned that to do so might jeopardize the effectiveness of the party as a political organization and alienate it from the masses: "to do so would cut across its purpose, dilute its nature as a political organization, transform it into an organization advancing one or another scientific or cultural viewpoint, narrow its appeal, and cripple its ability to mobilize the masses on political questions." (Is gay liberation, then, not a political question?) This represented a catering to backward elements within the party leadership and an adaptation to the supposed bigotry of the masses of working people (a genteel reformulation of the idea that "workers hate queers"). It is a case of the so-called vanguard following, not leading, the masses. Principle bit the dust here in favor of pragmatism.

Second, it asserted that "especially concerning homosexuality, little is known, and it is difficult to ascertain what is objectively based and what represents prejudice in what knowledge is available." This is nonsense on two accounts: Quite a bit is known about the nature of homosexual behavior (certainly enough to state that it is in no way inferior to or less natural than heterosexual behavior), and it is not at all difficult to ascertain what is prejudice and what is not. (Gays, at least, are very good at doing so.) But the assertion blatantly contradicts

## The Memorandum states:

- that "the party does not and should not take a stand on the nature of homosexuality."
- that gay liberation lacks "social weight."
- a warning against "exotic" forms of dress and decorum.
- that all-women's functions be organized such that they "do not present an image that they are restricted to lesbians."

the previously stated rejection of "all forms of bourgeois prejudice." How can you reject prejudice when you cannot be sure that it is prejudice? Rather than attempt to explain away this contradiction, the leadership chose to ignore it.

There was another contradiction here. In one breath, the memorandum claimed to reject the notion that gays were mentally ill, yet in the next breath it refused to take a "stand" on the nature of homosexuality. By saying that homosexuality was not a mental illness, however, it had already taken a stand on the very subject it proposed not to take any stand on! A case, indeed, of having your cake and eating it too. Needless to say, it was not possible to take seriously a document of this sort.

3. After situating the gay movement in its historic context, and characterizing it as "progressive"

and "in the interests of socialism," the memorandum went on to belittle the potential of the gay struggle by asserting that it relates to a "relatively narrow sector of the population," that it lacks the "potential mass" and "social weight" of movements like the women's liberation and black liberation movements, and that it is "much more peripheral to the central issues of the class struggle" than those movements. Since the SWP is a serious party, it could not waste time on "peripheral" issues, and gay liberation would therefore merit a low priority in the party's work and program. Since the SWP is a small party, with limited forces, it would be a mistake to "generally assign comrades to this movement." Instead, it proposed to "support" gay liberation "mainly in our propaganda."

The predictable effect of this has been to gradually pull the few party members involved in gay groups out of them on the grounds that they were needed elsewhere — presumably to work on the "central issues" of the class struggle. This process has, in fact, been going on since the convention, and accounts for the party's present abstention from gay liberation. In addition, the party's propaganda has less and less to say about gay liberation. Its newspaper, for instance, hardly even carries news coverage of the gay struggle, let alone any kind of in-depth or theoretical material relevant to it; the SWP has nothing to offer in this area. Its members are therefore increasingly isolated from the gay movement, which has the dubious advantage of taking the heat off a leadership that behaves as though it wished the gay movement would go away and leave it alone. It can always argue that if its newspaper carries next to nothing on gay liberation, it must be because the gay movement is doing next to nothing; this argument might sound plausible to a membership whose only source of information on the gay movement is the party's newspaper.

4. The memorandum concluded with an outrageous and intimidating section warning against "exotic" forms of dress and decorum, and insisting that all-women's functions "be organized in such a way that they do not project an image that the function is in reality restricted to lesbians." It implied that gays tend toward freaky appearance (presumably unlike straight males, whose sometimes robot-like behavior has always struck me as being downright weird), and that if they are too blatant they would give the party an "exotic" image. This section was an insult to gays.

As a kind of postscript, it proposed no special point on the convention agenda on gay liberation, even though the party had been discussing it for more than two and a half years, and was now coming to a decision on what the party's relationship to the gay movement should be.

The pro-gay liberation forces subjected this memorandum to a devastating, point-by-point critique, but there is not space enough in this article to go into it. In a nutshell, the memorandum had two basic flaws.

First, it reduced the gay liberation struggle to a struggle for gay rights; it refused to see it as a struggle against the exclusive heterosexual norm of capitalist society, as a struggle for a society in which the suppressed homosexual potential of everybody could be liberated. Rather, it conceived of gay liberation as a struggle by a fixed social minority, called "gay people," for greater tolerance by a presumed heterosexual majority. It thus refused to approach the question of gay oppression and liberation from a historical-materialist point of view, which would have necessitated an analysis of the origins of the antihomosexual taboo. It preferred to suspend judgment on whether homosexuality was some kind of historical aberration that might disappear in the socialist society of the future (a position privately voiced by certain leaders). At best, this position amounts to a purely reformist grasp of the dynamics of gay liberation. At worst, it represents a complete rejection of the Marxist approach and a capitulation to prejudice.

Second, the memorandum was not honest. While claiming to hold open the door to possible party participation in the gay movement (albeit with an incorrect program and analysis), it failed to provide any perspective for such participation, and in fact laid the groundwork for abstention from it.

\*This is a three-month period of oral and written discussion that precedes conventions within Bolshevik organizations. During this period, every member has a right to have any document, on any topic relevant to party activity, published and circulated to the entire membership, at party expense. Proposals for party activity in the future are debated and voted upon in every party unit.



SWP, continued from page 3

## COUNTERRESOLUTION

Pro-gay liberation forces in the party submitted a counterresolution, which focused the discussion on the real issues. We traced the recent history and scope of the gay movement on a national and international scale, and provided a concrete description of the issues it raised and the struggles it had engaged in (against sodomy laws, for equal rights legislation, for campus recognition, against police harassment, against oppression by the psychiatric profession, forcing politicians to express support for its demands, etc.). We explained the concept of gay pride and the slogan "Gay is Good" as a rejection of the "myths society uses to justify and perpetuate its efforts to suppress homosexuality." These myths, we stated, "range from the theological notion that homosexuality is 'unnatural,' to the Stalinist-inspired view that it is a product of 'bourgeois decadence' (or the variation that it is a product of class society), to the various 'theories' of bourgeois psychiatrists that homosexuality is an illness."

We analyzed the relationship between the struggle for gay liberation and the struggle to replace capitalism with a truly free society. In a key section,

we rejected the notion that "gay people" constitute a special variety of human being, and noted: "The ultimate impact and appeal of the gay liberation movement can only be understood on the basis of the fact that it involves a struggle not merely for the rights of a presently constituted minority who are defined as gay, but for an end to the built-in need of capitalist society to suppress homosexual behavior in all of its members. Homosexual oppression is reflected not only in the discrimination and persecution directed against persons who are either known or suspected to be gay, but also in the pervasive efforts of capitalist society to completely suppress homosexuality even before it may arise, and to threaten violators with severe reprisals both in this world and the next. The effects of this oppression are felt on a far wider scale than merely among those who admit, whether to themselves or publicly, to being gay."

We proposed that the party "intervene in and champion the struggle for gay liberation." We gave concrete examples of the kinds of things the party could do. And we proposed that it assign members to help build the gay liberation movement "in accord with our overall program and campaigns, including our full support to, and championing of, the struggle for gay liberation."

We demanded a separate point on the convention agenda to allow for a full discussion of the

issues.

Our counterresolution was debated throughout the party and won considerable support. The majority of at least two party branches voted for it at the end of their local pre-convention discussion. One party leader who had recently come out also supported it. Seven delegates, I believe, voted for it. But the leadership, by refusing to allow a separate point on the agenda for discussion of the question, succeeded in relegating it to a side issue and prevented anywhere near an adequate debate. It lost, and the SWP was stuck with a position on gay liberation that is so contradictory and embarrassing that it does not dare publish it.

This decision was too bad because it will only make more difficult the necessary task of bringing socialist consciousness to the gay liberation movement, and of winning the working class to a correct understanding of the relationship between its historic interests and the struggle against the sexual oppression of capitalist society.

Following the 1973 SWP discussion, it became clear to me that I could make a greater contribution to this historic task by leaving the SWP than I could by remaining in it. Time alone will tell whether or not the SWP can correct the error it made in August 1973. The first step would be to throw its memorandum into the nearest trashcan. □



REPORT ON MEMBERSHIP POLICY GIVEN TO THE POLITICAL  
COMMITTEE OF THE SWP BY JACK BARNES, FRIDAY,  
NOVEMBER 13, 1970

Since the early 1960s the party and YSA have been moving toward a policy which proscribes homosexuals membership. This was mentioned in the organizational report to the February 1970 SWP plenum. The evolution of this policy was summarized as part of the organizational report which was adopted by the August 1970 YSA plenum. This report was printed in the September 2, 1970, *Young Socialist Organizer*.

The main purpose of this policy was the protection of the party now and in the future from the effects of legal or extralegal victimization and blackmail of homosexual members.

The Administrative Committee believes that this policy is wrong. It doesn't accomplish its purpose and it breeds problems and misinterpretations both internally and publicly. In so doing it shifts attention from the central question in all membership policies and decisions—the security of the party, its growth by recruitment from the mass movement, its capacity for disciplined activity in all periods, and its political homogeneity.

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Most homosexual organizations have described the problems and oppression that homosexuals face in capitalist society. These problems range from the threat of physical attacks to the invocation of archaic and reactionary legal codes concerning sexual behavior, to occupational exclusion, the threat of blackmail, housing problems, and various forms of psychological oppression and social pressure. All of these are very real problems that homosexuals face to one degree or another, and which can lead to conflicts with the cops, blackmail, and susceptibility to pressures of all kinds.

Another thing which the homosexual organizations point out is that because of the depth and intensity of social pressure and prejudice, the psychological pressure on homosexuals is such that a homosexual usually goes through personal, sexual crises in which she or he becomes obsessed—to the detriment of other aspects of her or his life—with the problem of finding any fulfilling sex life under these conditions and in this society.

In the past experience of the party, this aspect of the life of a homosexual has led to membership problems. That is, some homosexual comrades reached the stage in a personal crisis, in which being a member of our kind of political organization and being able to throw herself or himself into the work of the party became difficult or impossible. Under these conditions they often tried one way or another, directly or indirectly, to change the character of the party into some form of therapeutic organization which would help solve the personal problems of the individual homosexual. We've had several experiences like this. What happened under these circumstances in the past was that a leading comrade in the area had discussions with the homosexual comrade facing such difficulties. No one can remember a single instance where there was ultimately any problem in such a person understanding through discussion that the best course would be to become a sympathizer or move away from the party. Quite often instances of this sort involved

people moving away from organized revolutionary political life. Such a person can't handle his or her personal development to the degree that she or he can be enough of a stable, disciplined party member whose basic fulfillment comes from political activity as a disciplined member of a combat party. Needless to say, this type of problem is not limited to homosexual comrades. We also have homosexual comrades for whom this question has never come up. Their personal lives, regardless of the problems and pressures that were entailed, did not conflict with party membership.

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As we have discussed this question informally, everyone agreed that we must put the discussion of our policy in the context of the changing objective situation. First, there is the change in attitudes that is gradually evolving in this country. There's no question that the general acceptance of different norms of personal behavior has increased. This has reflections in the legal sphere. One state, Illinois, has abolished all penalties for homosexual acts between consenting adults. Other state legislatures are discussing it.

In the last election the two main New York state candidates of the Democratic Party and one of the candidates for the Republican Party—Goldberg, Ottinger and Goodell—all came out with public statements endorsing what was in essence a Bill of Rights for homosexuals, demanding that they be treated like other citizens, that their private lives be their own and not be subject to legal or police restraint as long as they don't damage the rights of other people. Quite a few other candidates made statements—Walinsky, and several of the congressional candidates. This is the first time comrades can remember that major bourgeois candidates did this. The fact that they did take such a stand in the midst of an election campaign says a lot about the changing attitudes in society as a whole.

There are a number of cases now at various levels of the federal court system demanding rights for homosexuals. Legal fights against entrapment laws and entrapment practices have been successful in several states and municipalities. A homosexual in Connecticut is fighting to get a driver's license which has been denied him because of his conviction for sodomy. This case is being handled not by a small group of radical lawyers, but by the Connecticut ACLU. And this legal test, like others, is being reported objectively and favorably in papers like *The New York Times*.

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One characteristic of the radicalization itself, especially in the youth movement, has been discussion about sex. Adolescents have all kinds of social restrictions put upon them concerning their private lives, and especially their sex lives. The way they're treated in the schools, under the law, etc. has become an issue among radicalizing youth. So there's a widespread and growing opposition in very broad layers of young people in this country



against sexual repression and the enforced mutilation of sexuality.

This has been reinforced by the rise of the women's liberation movement, which has been even more intimately concerned with repression of homosexuals. This is true because one of the central questions faced by the women's movement is the question of sexual oppression. In addition to their class, race or national oppression, women are especially oppressed as a sex. Comrades are familiar with the many things which the women's liberation movement has done to draw attention to this—the publicity campaigns, the propaganda and educational materials that have been written by various activists in the women's liberation movement against the objectification of sex, against the exploitation of sexual relations, against the reactionary and debilitating sexual norms and pressures of society, against the possessive and compulsive sexual relations bred by this system. They see that the social attitudes toward homosexuals are simply another facet of a sick sexist racist class society. From the beginning a certain number of women's liberation activists and leaders have publicly identified themselves as homosexuals or bisexuals. And more and more the women's liberation movement has recognized the reactionary character of lesbian-baiting and the threat it poses to the movement if capitulated to.

Finally we have growing numbers of public political and social organizations of homosexuals, something that is unique in American history. Beginning in 1968 and early 1969 and undoubtedly sparked by the general radicalization and reinforced by the rise of the women's liberation movements, we saw across the country the proliferation of homosexual and homosexual rights organizations. It's probably not an exaggeration to say that almost every major campus in this country has either a homosexual rights organization or an organization of militant homosexuals demanding their rights, demanding an end to all discrimination, demanding a scientific and objective view of homosexuals as human beings. It's become the norm, as opposed to being unusual, for contingents of the more militant and more open homosexual groups to march in various protest demonstrations in addition to organizing some of their own.

This all takes place in the post-Kinsey period. For the first time, scientific knowledge of the extent of homosexuality, and the characteristics of homosexuality has become widespread. This has helped in breaking down the stereotype of society divided into exclusively homosexual and exclusively heterosexual people. The fact that individual human beings go through different periods in their lives, with different characteristics to their sexuality, has become more widely known. The fact that homosexuality of one kind or another is widespread in the population, that it cuts through all geographical and class layers, has been established.

There has also been the experience, the growing body of literature available and the evolution in the understanding of the younger generation. The younger generation has begun to differentiate between sexuality and reproduction, sexuality and religious norms, sexuality and the sex-roles imposed by the nuclear family system, and has begun to understand the relation between sexuality and class society. For this generation, opposition to restrictive norms and repressive attitudes that feed reactionary ideologies has become the norm.

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We had been evolving toward a policy of blanket proscription of homosexuals from membership in the party. The faults of this policy are several. One is general enforceability.

The more we thought about it the more we realized we were not enforcing this policy and we could not enforce this policy. Maybe one of the ways to look at this is to compare it to our policy on narcotics and marijuana, use of which is incompatible with party membership. We have this blanket policy for a variety of reasons the comrades know, including the chance of victimization and frame-ups, of which there's been a whole record of experience in the radical movement, and the hatred of many of the oppressed of this country for the narcotics trade. We've had a firm and clear policy on this question, which we've enforced. When we know of, have evidence of, or even hear rumors of the use of marijuana in the organization, we look into it. If it's true we tell the comrades they have to knock it off, we explain why and say they must comply with this rule or leave the organization. We've done this consistently and even-handedly. It's not been arbitrary, it has not been tongue-in-cheek, and it has not basically been handled one way in one locality and a different way in another. If our policy was to be the blanket proscription of homosexuals from membership in the SWP, we would have to enforce such a policy in the way we enforce the narcotics policy.

It is a policy that can easily be misused. If it's really going to be a policy, it would be the obligation of branch organizers and executive committees to check into the sexual predilection of prospective members, if one is supposed to proscribe a certain sexual category from membership. It doesn't take much imagination to think of the negative results of this practice.

If we do not carry out and enforce the policy uniformly, an additional problem comes up. That is, it becomes known that there is a policy of the party that is not enforced uniformly. If the policy is not enforced at all, then it appears that the leadership supports the policy only tongue-in-cheek. That would be a default of leadership. If it is enforced, but not uniformly and consistently, there would be the suspicion that the leadership was being arbitrary. Why pick this one and not that one? Over a time, this would raise the question of the leadership's fairness in carrying out other general policies.

Our tradition, the tradition of the revolutionary movement, has been that the private lives, the psychological and cultural views, and the sexual behavior of individual comrades is basically their own business. There's been a general tolerance within the movement, as opposed to a society which in general is very intolerant of anything that's different or threatens its morals and norms. At the same time, the party is not responsible for what members do as private individuals and does not take responsibility for their private conduct. While minimizing interference in or responsibility for the private lives of members, their private conduct and their personal demeanor must be subordinated to the needs of the party as a whole. If a person's private life became damaging to the party the individual is asked to leave the party. As I outlined earlier the party's security, its capacity to recruit militants for the mass movement, political homogeneity, and its cap-



disciplined action always comes first.

Putting the homosexual question per se aside, we occasionally have comrades who go through periods where they simply are not in control of themselves personally or psychologically. We sometimes have to ask them to leave or find a way out of the party for them at a certain stage. The same is true with comrades who get on a kick and decide they are proselytes whose mission is to put the party on trial or to turn the party into something other than a revolutionary socialist combat party. Individual revolutionaries are very interested in culture, art, sex and the evolution of social norms. But we must always remember that the party's role is political. It is defined by its purpose and the strength of its enemies. First and foremost is the organization and recruitment from the mass movement of a combat party that has a political program for the defeat of the capitalist system. A large number of questions of art, cultural norms, etc., are not really within the field of party policy. As long as we in fact apply the materialist method in our analysis there is plenty of room for divergences of opinion. It is a very good idea to have a little tolerance for each others' views on these matters.

The party is a political, not a therapeutic, organization. While revolutionaries get their personal satisfaction from understanding and working to change this society, we neither accept members nor do we keep members ultimately because it is good for them. We recruit members and we keep members because it is good for the party.

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Any sort of blanket membership proscription of homosexuals cannot remain and has not remained an internal question in the SWP. In several cities, we've been publicly attacked or asked to clarify our position on homosexual membership. The comrades have responded to

such attacks or questions with leaflets and public statements which show the difficulty of trying to explain to non-members the reasons for a blanket proscription of homosexuals. Secondly, such statements have shown the discomfort our members feel in trying to carry out this policy. It raises a whole series of concrete problems within the women's liberation movement: problems of recruitment, of hidden red-baiting in the form of slander, of misinterpretation. There's no question that the membership of our movement is in its overwhelming majority uncomfortable with such a policy. We see all the evidence of that. Of course we also know that with some newer members this is for the wrong reasons. It takes a little while for members, especially new members, to actually come to an understanding of what a revolutionary party is and what it cannot be.

But more is involved than misunderstanding by new members. What is really involved is an uncomfortableness with a policy which is really not viable in that it creates more real problems for the party than it solves.

So the conclusion the Administrative Committee has come to is that we should reject this evolution toward a policy of proscription of homosexual members per se and continue the actual practice which has basically been the party's policy on this type of question for some time. That is, we will continue to deal on an individual basis with any homosexual comrade or any other comrade who because of a personal crisis or personal demeanor, more and more finds her or his personal life in conflict with disciplined functioning in the party or in conflict with the kind of a party that can recruit out of the mass movement, that is going to become a mass party. And secondly, of course, we will continue to take into account the character and personal demeanor of anyone who applied for membership. We always have. But a general policy of proscription of homosexuals is incorrect.



(The following is the section on gay liberation from Perspectives and Lessons of the New Radicalization, the National Committee Draft Political Resolution, adopted March 14, 1971.)

As the radicalization has deepened, other issues have been raised and new movements have come forward: the revulsion against capitalism's destruction of our environment and the ecological system on which the life of humanity depends, the development of radicalism among the laymen and clergy of the Catholic Church, the prison revolts, the increasing radicalization inside the army, the gay liberation movement against the legal and extra-legal oppression of homosexuals. The radicalization has likewise had big repercussions in professional, cultural and artistic circles.

The wave of prison revolts that erupted in 1970 had a different quality from the protests that historically are endemic to prison life. This was to be seen in the conduct of the Black and Puerto Rican leaderships of these revolts. The prisoners who have led and participated in these struggles consciously see themselves as victims of the class and racial bias of American justice. They are inspired by the revolutionary literature they read and the examples set by figures like Malcolm X and George Jackson. The essence of their demands for prison and judicial reforms has been an affirmation of their dignity and humanity. The recognition by most young radicals of the prison struggles as part of the movement and their sympathy and identification with their demands is a further gauge of the radicalization.

As with prisoners, bourgeois society views homosexuals as outcasts.

The gay liberation movement has raised a series of demands against the way homosexuals are treated by bourgeois society. These include insistence on equality before the law like other citizens, with full rights in all respects; that their private lives be their own, free from legal or police restraint; against police entrapment practices; for their acceptance as equals in all spheres of social life.

The gay liberation movement was strongly influenced by the opposition of the women's liberation movement to the commercial exploitation of sex, the reduction of sex to something other than a free human relation, the reactionary and stifling sexual norms of bourgeois society, and the psychological distortions of sexuality in a class society based on the nuclear family system. The women's movement began to see that the antagonistic attitudes towards homosexuals are simply another facet of a sick social order.

One characteristic of the radicalization is the growing opposition among very broad layers of young people against sexual oppression of any kind. This has been reinforced by the women's and the gay liberation movements.

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(The following is the section on gay liberation from Report to the SWP National Committee Plenum on the Draft Political Resolution "Perspectives and Lessons of the New Radicalization" by Jack Barnes. The general line of this report was approved March 14, 1971.)

We're seeing two things in this radicalization which are occurring in a quite different way than in the Russian Revolution. George Novack made the point yesterday that it took the February Revolution--Trotsky said that if it had done nothing else it would have been totally justified by this alone--to awaken and bring into struggle the oppressed nationalities in Russia. And it took the victory of the October Revolution with the workers coming to power under the



leadership of the Bolsheviks to begin raising and grappling with some of the problems that are being raised today for example by the women's liberation movement and the demand for just treatment of homosexuals put forward by the gay liberation movement.

In this radicalization we are seeing the rise of the self-conscious struggle and organization of America's oppressed nationalities and the beginnings of movements whose demands are so deep that they can only be begun to be met by a workers state--and we are seeing this prior to the large-scale participation by the working class in the radicalization, let alone a revolutionary upsurge. And the questions of alienation; of the hierarchical relationships necessary to capitalist society which foster and rationalize oppression based on class, race, sex, age, etc.; of who controls one's life and work--all being raised by one or another different movement--become generalized and begin affecting the consciousness of the entire population including the working class that directly face all these problems.

We also see a process occurring which is important in any radicalization and can eventually be a key factor leading to a revolutionary situation. That is the gradual decay of the moral authority of the rulers, their spokesmen, and their institutions, and the shift of that authority in the process of struggle, in the eyes of growing numbers of people, from the rulers, their spokesmen and apologists, to the movements fighting against the evils of capitalism. This is one of the important characteristics and effects of things like the broadening radicalization in the army, the rebellions in the prisons, the rise of the gay liberation movement, the deepening of the women's liberation struggle, the pride of the militants of the oppressed nationalities.

The Cubans said, in the Second Declaration of Havana, "For this great mass of humanity has said, 'enough!' and has begun to march." That captures part of the spirit of this radicalization. There is no layer too oppressed, too prejudiced against, too repressed, too denigrated as an outcast by capitalist society to stand up, to assert that they be treated as fully human, that the quality of life they live be improved. This American capitalism cannot grant.

I want to say a few words here about the gay liberation movement. At the YSA convention the comrades had an initial discussion of the gay liberation movement and have begun, in various locals, to find out more information about it, and to support actions that oppose and expose the anti-democratic repressive laws against gay people. Frank, in the youth report, will outline this further. I don't need to add anything to what the resolution said about the objective importance of the gay liberation movement or the incapacity of our opponents to come to grips with movements like this as revolutionists.



**MOTION ADOPTED BY POLITICAL COMMITTEE**

**May 25, 1971**

1) That the party conduct a probe of the gay liberation movement for the purpose of gathering information. The information sought includes facts about the present size of the gay liberation movement, its geographical spread, the history of its development, the specific nature of the different gay liberation groups, the demands which have been raised by the gay liberation organizations, the political positions of the different currents within the gay liberation movement, the positions of our opponents concerning it, and its relationship to the developing radicalization.

2) The probe will be conducted within the framework of the party's unconditional support to the struggles of homosexuals for civil and human rights against the discrimination and oppression they suffer under capitalism. However, steps taken for the purposes of this probe do not signify setting in motion at this time a process of party fractional intervention based on a defined strategic and tactical orientation in the gay liberation movement. The purpose of this probe is solely to gather the necessary information about gay liberation formations and actions so that the party can then determine its policy toward them.

3) The party branches are responsible for carrying out this probe in their areas. The decisions on how to do this in each case must be made in light of the overall personnel situation and the responsibility of the branch to carry out the major activities of the party.

In cases where there are openly gay comrades, individuals can be assigned to attend meetings and participate in selected activities of different gay liberation organizations and ad hoc formations as part of this probe. However, these comrades should not be assigned to this probe on any premise that in their particular case such an assignment should automatically have priority over other party tasks.

Homosexual comrades have joined or will join the SWP on the same basis that anyone else joins the SWP, on the basis of acceptance of our full program and agreement to loyally build the SWP and help to carry out its decisions in all spheres of party work. Conversely, the party as a whole has the responsibility to see that a homosexual comrade, like any other comrade, is integrated in a rounded way in party life and activities.

The deepgoing personal consequences for anyone to openly declare themselves to be homosexual emphasizes the importance of the fact that the question of whether or not a homosexual comrade decides to so declare himself or herself is a personal decision. No pressure from the party should be placed on any comrade either for or against them openly declaring themselves as gay.

4) This probe will be carried out in collaboration with the YSA, which has initiated similar action. It is to be conducted under the supervision of the Administrative Committee. All reports, results and questions concerning this probe should be addressed to the Administrative Committee.



## ANSWERS TO SOME QUESTIONS ON GAY LIBERATION

by David Thorstad

Vol. 29, No. 12)

Upper West Side Branch, New York Local

There are two kinds of questions about homosexuality and liberation that one encounters in our movement. The first reveals a genuine concern about the character and goals of the gay liberation movement, its potential to develop into a mass movement with a revolutionary character, and the extent to which the revolutionary party must concern itself with this movement. Our probe and discussion with the gay liberation movement will help answer some of these questions.

The second comes from comrades who are hostile to the gay liberation movement because of prejudice or because of a general failure to grasp the radical nature of both.

The following is not meant to discuss all of these questions, but only some of the most common. Both because of overlap, and for reasons of convenience, both kinds of questions are dealt together.

**I HAVE A RIGHT TO DO THEIR OWN THING  
AS LONG AS THEY DON'T CRAM IT DOWN MY  
THROAT.**

In the case of some straights, gay liberation may have been crammed down their throat. That is up to them. They can overcome what prejudice they have long had to think objectively about homosexuality and gay liberation, this will probably not be necessary. But they allow irrationality and emotionalism to dominate their field of vision, then there will be no alternative.

Still, this "let them do their own thing" notion misses the point of what gay liberation is all about. It reflects a liberal, not a revolutionary, grasp of the question. For while it is true that the acquisition of our civil liberties—the right to be who we are—is an important aspect of the struggle for gay liberation, it is not the most fundamental one.

The essential thrust of gay liberation is not merely to win from straight society the right to express our sexual orientation without being ridiculed, beat up and murdered, without losing our jobs and friends, and without being. No. It also involves a struggle for sexual liberation. It ultimately aims at liberating the sexuality of everyone from the restrictions and puritanism of American capitalist society.

These sexual norms, from which both gays and straights have to be freed, are heterosexual.

According to Kinsey and other authorities on sexuality, every human being is born with a general sexual capacity which includes both the heterosexual and the homosexual. In other words, the capacity for homosexual behavior exists in nature and is as much a part of the basic human sexual capacity as heterosexual behavior. (This, incidentally, is the meaning of the slogan "2, 4, 6, 8—Gay is Just as Good as Straight.") It is society—not any inborn characteristic—that subsequently determines the predominance of heterosexuality or homosexuality in an individual. The fact that homosexual behavior is absent from the lives of most Americans does not prove the superiority of heterosexuality but merely demonstrates the success with which society has instilled its own warped sexual norms in people.

In our society, unlike most other human societies, the

only acceptable sexual norm is one of exclusive heterosexuality. Our society condemns all homosexual behavior, in all ages and in either sex. The fact that this norm has nothing whatever to do with real human sexual potential, but even represents a distortion of that potential, does not prevent it from being enforced in ways that inflict great suffering on individual human beings and immeasurable loss to society through wasted human potential. And the fact that this norm is violated by millions of Americans merely emphasizes the degree to which it is out of tune with the reality of human sexuality.

One of the strongest implements society uses to mould the growing child into the acceptable social forms and to keep people there as adults is the coercion to behave like a member of one's own sex (to be a *real* man, to be *really* feminine). Anyone who deviates from these norms is quickly labeled "queer."

These sex stereotypes and definitions not only have nothing to do with real human potential; they are also reflections of the social needs of the dominant, heterosexual, capitalist society, and they change as those needs change. With the rise of entrepreneurial capitalism, for instance, the rugged individual was the ideal—at least the male ideal. Today there are no more entrepreneurs to speak of and the rugged individual image is no longer useful. In today's consumer society, it is not people with initiative who are needed, but rather people who lack it, people who follow orders—whether it is buying detergent or killing the enemy in Vietnam or hating homosexuals. In a technologically advanced, complex stage of imperialism, the male ideal is the astronaut, the mechanized, unthinking robot.

These images change for women too. During the second world war, when the capitalists needed to tap the reserve army of labor to which women belong, the image projected for women was not that of today's happy housewife, content with the socially useless and unrewarding labor of a home-centered life. No woman today who refuses to play dumb and pretend that she likes being denied the opportunity to develop as a free human being, independent of a man, will for long escape the accusation that she too is "queer."

These sex stereotypes are used not only to sell the products of a consumer society. They are used to keep people in line. If you spend all your energy trying to conform to this society's warped and rigid definitions of a "real man" and a "real woman"—and both straights and closeted gays spend enormous amounts of energy doing precisely that—then you will have none left for the struggle to overthrow the society that imposes those definitions on you.

Many straights can be appealed to to support gay liberation precisely because it will help break down these rigid sex definitions. You don't have to be gay to understand that gay liberation will also help free you from the compulsion to prove your masculinity or to be truly "feminine." And so, in the process of achieving their freedom to be gay, gay people will be helping to liberate straights too.

But this liberation will go deeper than the shedding of role playing and sex stereotyping. It ultimately involves



sexual liberation in general: freedom to develop and express one's sexual orientation without social constraints; freedom to relate to persons of the same or opposite sex as human beings, not as objects or tools; freeing of the capacity for homosexual love which the heterosexual norm in our society is designed to root out.

Does this mean that in supporting gay liberation we should also support the idea of proselytizing to homosexuality? Not at all. That would be artificial and coercive. (This is why, in my opinion, a slogan like "Hey, Hey, What Do You Say? Try It Once The Other Way" is incorrect—no matter how generous it may seem to ask straights to try it our way once when every institution of straight society has been marshalled to force us to conform to a norm of exclusive heterosexuality.) To those who wish to "come out" or "go gay," fine. But while being gay has its blessings, it is no panacea for difficulties of heterosexuality in a society that is predicated on distorting *all* human relationships—whether they be gay or straight. Full sexual freedom will come only with the replacement of that society with socialism.

#### THE RISE OF THE GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT MAY REFLECT THE DEPTH OF THE CURRENT RADICALIZATION, BUT THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE MOVEMENT TO THE RADICALIZATION IS ESSENTIALLY A PERIPHERAL ONE.

The gay liberation movement is as much a part of the radicalization as any other movement. It is not something on the fringes of the radicalization. Rather, it is the logical outgrowth of that radicalization, which not only draws ever new social layers into struggle, but which also provides for considerable political cross-pollination between different movements. Some of the organizers of the gay liberation movement learned what skills they have in the antiwar movement; many lesbians were active in the women's liberation movement from the very start and are today involved in both it and the gay women's movement.

If the gay liberation movement was later than some others in coming on the scene, its impact is still far from having been felt. When the full impact of gay liberation is felt, when the antihomosexual influence of our social institutions has been dispelled and their structure transformed, when the sex-typing that herds people into mutually exclusive categories of "real men" and "real women," heterosexual and homosexual, normal and abnormal is overcome, it won't be so easy to find people claiming that the struggle for gay liberation has played a "peripheral" role.

The central issue being raised by the gay liberation movement is also the central one for other movements: the right to control our own destiny. Those who believe that control over one's body is not as important as control over the means of production are poorly posing the problem. Both are important and both are related. Both involve a struggle to take the control over the decisions that affect our lives out of the hands of the capitalist ruling class and put it into the hands of the oppressed. Neither will be achieved as long as this capitalist society is allowed to continue to exist.

The dynamics of the current radicalization are such that a growing awareness of oppression in one area, and the determination to struggle against it, lead logically to the realization that something is wrong with society

as a whole. While it is true that in the case of gay liberation some goals, such as the elimination of the sex laws can certainly be achieved under capitalism (and their achievement will give added impetus to the movement), homosexual liberation cannot be. It can only be achieved with the fundamental transformation of this society.

Perhaps the idea that the gay liberation movement is a relatively unimportant one is based on the assumption that it cannot appeal to very large numbers of people. Such an assumption would be unwarranted. The gay liberation movement has the potential to appeal to and involve in action very large numbers, and in this way too it has much to contribute to the radicalization. If Kinsey's statistics are taken as reliable (and, if anything, they are too low), there are around 10 million American men and between 2 and 6 million women who are more or less exclusively gay. This is not a small minority. Millions more (46 percent of American males) recognize in themselves or act upon erotic responses to persons of the same sex. There is no reason to doubt that a large number of these people can be brought into action by the gay liberation movement.

And when they are, they will not be timid in putting forward their demands for liberation. The realization that what you thought was your own personal hang-up was really a hang-up of straight society, and the discovery of the sheer numerical magnitude of people who are gay and thus suffer the same oppression, are sufficient in themselves to produce an explosive rage in gay people. The revolutionary movement would be foolish not to recognize and welcome this.

The movement for gay liberation not only has the potential to involve large numbers, but it cuts into one of the deepest-going prejudices society uses to divide and isolate people, to render them docile, fearful and subservient to those in power. An indication of the depth of this prejudice is the fact that it exists to the extent it does even within the revolutionary party. I doubt if misogyny and racism were ever as widespread in our movement as the prejudice against homosexuality. This prejudice is so pervasive in our society that gay people are not safe even in gay ghettos. In Greenwich Village—probably the largest gay ghetto in the world—gays can still be beaten up for as innocent an act as holding hands on the street.

The gay liberation movement cuts across the lines of sex, color and class as does no other movement, except the antiwar movement. And it is raising an issue about which nobody can remain completely indifferent.

To the extent that the free development and expression of sexuality is an important factor in the lives of all human beings, and to the degree that the elimination of sex typing will be necessary to achieve this, gay liberation has a role to play in the liberation of everyone, whether gay or straight. For without liberation from the restrictions on sexuality imposed by class society, it is impossible to talk about the liberation of humanity.

The gay liberation movement has added a whole new and potentially powerful sector to the growing list of oppressed groups struggling for liberation. Revolutionaries need no better reason to welcome it. Can a movement, after all, that in barely two years has grown from a handful of timid reformists into a movement with groups on hundreds of U. S. campuses, and that is spreading to other countries—England, Sweden, France, Italy, Cana-



in the Netherlands; that cuts into the heart of the puritanism and irrationality of American society; that has the potential for involving millions of men and women; that has adopted mass demonstrations as a natural vehicle for announcing its intentions and goals; that is compelling a reappraisal of sexuality, which affects everyone and the repression of which forms an integral part of the repressive apparatus of class society; that cannot achieve its goal of sexual emancipation without the emancipation of humanity as a whole—can such a movement be regarded as a "peripheral" one to the struggle for socialism? Not in the least.

## GAY LIBERATION ALIENATES BLACKS AND WORKERS. IT IS ALSO PETTY-BOURGEOIS.

This revelation is usually brought to our attention by comrades who are opposed to our movement supporting gay liberation, though they may not always frankly admit it. It is never, to my knowledge, expressed with bitterness at the bigotry of the alleged Blacks and workers who would be alienated by gay liberation, or even of fatigue at the prospect of yet another question about which revolutionists will have to do a bit of educating. No. It is usually viewed by those who express it as an argument against the revolutionary party having anything to do with gay liberation.

Now, it is a well-known fact that frequently—though perhaps not always—those who are most upset about homosexuality in public are closet queens (or straights who are unable to accept homosexual feelings in themselves). But this is a personal matter, one which has no real interest for a political discussion, except that unfortunately the two sometimes do overlap. Having mentioned the personal, however, let's dwell on the political.

Would our support to gay liberation alienate Blacks and workers? Quite possibly it might alienate some (though not all) straight Blacks and straight workers, although the response of gay Blacks and gay workers might be quite the opposite. But this, of course, is hardly the point. Those who raise this objection are not really concerned about alienating Blacks and workers; rather, they have somehow persuaded themselves that homosexuality is a phenomenon limited to a small section of (white) society—the petty-bourgeoisie and the upper class. This conviction, however, is not based on any knowledge of the subject except the most vulgar and personal.

Homosexuality is a phenomenon that exists in all social classes and in all races. If anything, according to Kinsey's statistics, it is more common among the working class than among other classes.

Yet, suppose it were true that the SWP's support to gay liberation would alienate it from Blacks and workers at their present level of consciousness. Would that justify turning our backs on this movement? Hardly. The same argument could be used against virtually any other objective or movement which revolutionary socialists support.

Most workers and Blacks, and even most petty-bourgeois, in the United States do not rejoice at the idea that some day the United States will go socialist. Yet, socialism is a goal to which revolutionists remain committed, and the gap between their consciousness and that of the masses does not prompt them to despair of ever winning the masses to that same commitment. On the contrary, it spurs them to analyze and apply experience in

such a way as to be able to help raise the level of consciousness to the point where it will no longer be necessary to merely *explain* the need for socialism but to actually *lead* the masses in the struggle to bring it about.

And what about our support to Black liberation? Is it not true that the majority of white workers are to some extent racist? When we put out literature explaining why white workers should support Black power, have we lost our contact with the masses of white workers? (After all, the reasons why white workers should support Black power are far from self-evident to large numbers of those white workers; and Blacks, moreover, constitute a minority of only around 10 percent of the population.) The answer, of course, is no. We understand the importance of fighting the racist prejudices of American society and explaining the political dynamism of Black liberation.

And women's liberation? Did we hesitate to support the liberation of women because most American males would not automatically welcome it? Or because it was "petty-bourgeois"? While the idea may have occurred to some comrades, the party had no trouble rejecting it.

And what about the demand for immediate withdrawal from Vietnam? Did we fight for this demand because it was thrown into our laps by the American people or because the masses of Americans supported the NLF victory that would result from the carrying out of this demand? To ask the question is to answer it.

Now, after all these movements, you would think that comrades would have learned something about the relationship of the radicalization to developing mass movements against oppression and the relationship of the revolutionary party to both. You would think that those who doubt the importance of gay liberation to the coming American socialist revolution would at least exhibit some modesty in questioning its importance. Alas, this is not always the case. Some comrades plunge into the fray with both hands and both feet and no head. One cannot help but suspect that comrades who resort to the specious argument that our support to gay liberation will alienate us from Blacks and workers are simply using this alleged prejudice as a smokescreen for their own backwardness.

## GAY WORKERS AND GAY BLACKS WILL NOT BE DRAWN INTO MASS ACTION AS GAYS BUT ON THE BASIS OF THEIR OPPRESSION AS WORKERS OR AS MEMBERS OF AN OPPRESSED NATIONAL MINORITY.

This statement reveals a mechanical approach to the radicalization. Just as the gay liberation movement is itself a product of the radicalization, so it too will have an impact on other sectors of society already affected by that radicalization, such as the Afro-American or the trade union movements. Precisely what forms that impact will take, of course, it is not possible to say. But there is no reason why gay workers should not be radicalized around their oppression as gays (for many gay activists, this is already the case). And what is to prevent gay workers from organizing themselves and moving into political action not just as workers, and not just as gays, but as *gay workers*? Or gay Blacks as *gay Blacks*? Nothing. This is a dialectical question, not one to be approached in a linear fashion.

Many people who are gay, including workers, may



never come out, that is, fully disclose their sexual orientation in public. Yet even those who stay in their closets may very well be inspired by the gay liberation movement to greater combativity in other areas—as Blacks, as Chicanos, as workers, as women, as opponents of the war, etc.

**THE TERM "STRAIGHT" SHOULD NOT BE USED TO DESIGNATE HETEROSEXUALS BECAUSE IT IS A PUT-DOWN.**

While it is true that the term "straight" is sometimes used to mean other things than the heterosexual equivalent of "gay" (such as square, clean-cut, not hip, etc.), this is not what is meant when it is used by gay people. For gays it means someone who is not gay.

"Straight" is an objective and accurate term. It means simply someone whose sexual activity is exclusively heterosexual and thus conforms to the socially acceptable norms of sexual behavior.

It is not a put-down of heterosexually oriented persons. It is not, for example, a gay equivalent of the term "honky." It is true that the kind of emotional polarization that would occur inside a revolutionary organization if Afro-American comrades referred to white comrades as "honkies" would be intolerable. Use of the term "straight," however, is not at all comparable.

A parallel might exist if Afro-Americans had spent years of their lives referring to themselves as honkies, trying to pass for honkies, striving to be better honkies than the honkies themselves. This is precisely what straight society has compelled gay people to do for centuries. When gay people use the word "straight," we are not using epithets. We are referring to a state of sexuality with which we are quite familiar. We are referring to our own past experience. If straight comrades are upset by the fact that we have rejected the exclusive heterosexual norms to which they adhere, that is their problem, not ours.

These norms are set by heterosexual society, not by gay people. People who feel comfortable following those norms should, of course, be free to do so. But gay people, who reject those norms, should be able to designate such persons with a heterosexual equivalent of the term "gay," without being obliged to always fall back on the clinical word "heterosexual" or the awkward construct "non-gay."

**HOMOSEXUAL SEDUCTION POSES A THREAT TO MINORS.**

Homosexuals are no more prone to seduce minors than are heterosexuals. The very existence of the notion that homosexuals are "child molesters" is nothing more than the product of the antihomosexual prejudice of our society. Preposterous though this notion is, it is used to exclude homosexuals from professions, like teaching, where they are in close contact with children.

Perhaps the most striking, and disappointing, example of the persistence of the notion that homosexuals contaminate children is the fact that the First National Congress on Education and Culture in Havana April 23-30 resorted to it as a justification for the proposal to relocate gays from cultural fields into "other organizations" where they will not "have any direct influence on our youth. . . ."

There is no scientific proof that seduction, whether homosexual or heterosexual, has anything to do with the development of an exclusive sexual orientation of either

kind. Many people's first sexual experience is heterosexual, not homosexual, and it is sometimes the result of seduction. This does not prevent some from developing a predominantly homosexual orientation. Most, of course, go on to maintain an exclusively heterosexual sex life, but no one attributes this to the fact that their first sexual experience was heterosexual. There is no reason to think that this process is any different in the case of persons whose first sexual encounter is homosexual. The factors that go into determining sexual orientation are far too complex to be reduced to a matter of seduction.

This is not an esoteric question, but one that our movement will eventually have to deal with. It is linked to the general sex-repressiveness of our society, reflected in the absurd idea that one's sexual life should not begin before adulthood or marriage. And it is tied up with the sex laws and the age of majority.

In European countries where homosexual acts are not illegal between consenting adults, they are often illegal between minors or between an adult and a minor. In addition, the age of consent varies and is often lower for heterosexual acts than for homosexual acts. Furthermore, even where homosexual acts are legal between consenting adults, as in the Netherlands, gangs of minors have been known to seduce adult homosexuals as a way of extorting money from them.

In the U. S., where homosexual acts are illegal in nearly every state under all circumstances (exceptions: Illinois, Connecticut and Idaho), a primary goal should be to wipe all the restrictive sex legislation off the books. In the meantime, comrades should be careful not to give the impression that revolutionists are for legalizing homosexual acts between consenting adults, but that we do not recognize the right of young people under 21 to discover and express their sexuality with the same freedom as everybody else.

The notion that homosexual seduction turns people into homosexuals is actually nothing more than a variation of the old "prairie fire" view of homosexuality. According to this view, homosexuality is so much fun that if it is not kept under control it will spread and may even replace heterosexuality. Such views are mystical.

**EVERYBODY'S SEXUALITY IS DISTORTED UNDER CLASS SOCIETY, BUT UNDER SOCIALISM, PEOPLE WILL BE BISEXUAL.**

I don't think it is possible to dispute the contention that everybody's sexuality is distorted under class society. The idea that under socialism everybody will be bisexual, however, is a different matter.

It seems to me that any claim for socialism in the area of sexuality that goes beyond the idea that it will permit the free development and expression of sexuality is rash. It is rash because there has never been a socialist society and we are not crystal ball gazers.

It is true that we do know a few things about basic human sexual capacity. And it might seem at first glance that admitting a basic sexual capacity that provides for both heterosexual and homosexual behavior would imply a bisexual expression of those capacities in a society without sexual restraints. Such a conclusion seems to me to be unwarranted. While simultaneous sexual relations with persons of the same and of the opposite sex may be the rule under socialism, other possibilities exist. In any case, it is quite likely that sex under socialism will bear very



the resemblance psychically or physically to sex as we know it under class society.

## HETEROSEXUALITY REALLY IS BETTER THAN HOMOSEXUALITY.

Several false notions lurk beneath the surface of this statement.

1) The idea that homosexuality is a distorted expression of sexual behavior that occurs when heterosexuality is not allowed to develop freely (as, for instance, in class society). The fact, however, is that homosexuality is no more a distorted aspect of sexual behavior under class society than is heterosexuality. And while it may be reassuring to some heterosexuals to believe that human beings are basically heterosexual, there is no scientific evidence whatsoever to back up such a belief.

2) The idea that human beings are physically equipped for heterosexual but not for homosexual. According to this teleological view, a penis was designed to go into a vagina and consequently heterosexuality is superior to (and more natural than) homosexuality. This is the prevailing view in our society.

It has two weaknesses. First, it ignores the practice of other kinds of heterosexual behavior than genital intercourse (such as oral-genital and anal sex). Second, it assumes that the physical structure of the human body, not the degree of pleasure or imagination involved, determines the enjoyment of sex. (People who resort to this foolish argument thus find themselves in the absurd position not only of passing judgment on a form of sexuality with which they are unfamiliar, but of trying to explain why heterosexual sex is fun despite the fact that a man's chest is not built to receive a woman's breasts.)

3) The idea that homosexuality is a product of decaying societies. This idea can be traced—at least in the case of people on the left who use it—to the triumph of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and the subsequent institution of laws persecuting homosexuality in 1934 (the early Bolsheviks wiped the czarist laws against homosexuality off the books after the 1917 revolution). The myth (never explained, only asserted) that homosexuality is a "product of decaying capitalism" is still the line pushed by the Stalinists, including the American Communist Party (as recently as in the January 1971 issue of *Political Affairs*). It is sometimes embellished with the claim that homosexuality goes hand in hand with fascism.

First, on fascism. Tens of thousands of gay people perished in Hitler's concentration camps, marked for death with the special Nazi insignia for gays—a pink triangle. There is no more reason to associate homosexuality with fascism than there is heterosexuality. To do so is nothing more than a fancy way for left-wing bigots to dress up their antihomosexual prejudice.

Second, homosexual behavior has played a role in human societies since the beginning of human society. It has been present—as has heterosexual behavior—in societies during their peak of creativity (Hellenic Greece) and during periods of decline (Ancient Rome). It occurs in primitive communistic societies (American Indians), advanced capitalist societies, and in societies that have abolished capitalism.

Homosexual behavior, like heterosexual behavior, occurs in every species of mammal that has ever been studied in any detail.

Homosexuality, like heterosexuality, brings joy and it

brings sorrows. It is no better and no worse than heterosexuality. It just is.

GAY LIBERATION DOES NOT POSE A THREAT TO THE BOURGEOISIE. IT IS REFORMIST, NOT REVOLUTIONARY. AFTER ALL, EVEN SOME BOURGEOIS ARE GAY.

This statement confuses two things. First, it confuses homosexuality with gay liberation. True, some bourgeois are gay; being gay is not in and of itself revolutionary (though it is more hazardous than being straight in a society that finds no way to integrate homosexuality in a positive way). The struggle to achieve gay liberation, however, like the struggle for women's liberation, is revolutionary. It, like the struggle for women's liberation, may attract some members of the bourgeoisie to its ranks, but that will be their contradiction, not ours.

Second, this statement confuses gay liberation with the mere acquisition of our civil liberties. But gay liberation involves more than that. It views gay liberation as an isolated phenomenon, and fails to recognize that it is an integral part of a deep wave of radicalization.

Gay liberation involves a struggle to eliminate the oppression of homosexuals, which is used to help maintain a society based on male supremacy, the subjugation of women, and private property. It involves the transformation of the institutions by which society implements that oppression. Foremost among these are the family, the schools and religion.

The nuclear family is the first institution most human beings encounter, and it is the one in which antihomosexual prejudice is first instilled in people. It is there that we learn the sex roles and sex stereotypes and the possessiveness that distort personal relationships in a male supremacist, heterosexual, capitalist society. It is there that we learn sexual repression, for the patriarchal family is an institution that is designed not to protect the free development of sexuality but to prevent it.

This is all reinforced in the educational system. Not only will the demand for gay studies undoubtedly be raised in the course of the struggle to transform the schools, but the pseudo-scientific quackery about homosexuality that is now passed on in certain fields (psychology, medicine, sociology) will have to go. Sex education in the schools must entail a rational, scientifically sound and positive presentation of homosexuality, whether it be in the colleges or in high school or in grade school.

The Christian church has been one of the most tenacious and damaging persecutors of homosexuality. There are still today millions of human beings whose sexuality is distorted and whose lives are infused with profound guilt because of the superstition and antihomosexuality of the church. The fact that some reformist gays here and there have chosen to set up gay churches rather than reject a religion whose holy books and history merit the contempt of homosexuals may add to the difficulties of the church in a period of radicalization but it does not make religion less an enemy of gay liberation.

The family, the schools and religion are not the only institutions in capitalist society that play a role in the oppression of homosexuals and which gay liberation will help to change. Others are the police, the courts, the mass media, marriage, and psychiatry.

Homosexual oppression is very closely tied up with the oppression of women, and so will be the liberation of both



gays and women. While there are differences between these two struggles and the oppression they fight (women are also oppressed as part of the reserve army of labor, for instance), they also have much in common.

The origins of the development of the oppression of women can be traced to the origin of the nuclear family and the rise of class society. While this also appears to be the source of the oppression of gay people, not nearly as much is known about it yet as is known about the development of the oppression of women. Still, a hint of the common origins of the oppression of women and homosexuals can be detected in the attitude toward male sodomy in societies that, like our own, attempt to suppress homosexuality.

The popular view of male sodomy is that it is degrading—at least to the participant in the so-called "passive role." Why is it considered degrading? Because it is allegedly dirty? No, for that would not explain the widespread occurrence of heterosexual sodomy. It is considered

degrading because in a male supremacist society, there is no lower rank to which a male can stoop than to imitate the position of a woman in heterosexual coitus. In some societies that had slavery (such as ancient Egypt), defeated enemies were often sodomized by the victors in what may have at least partially been not just for fun but as a way of humiliating the conquered.

This passive-active stereotype of sexual intercourse says as much about the degradation of women in class society and in the heterosexual sex act as it does about the oppression of male homosexuals.

The struggle for gay liberation is revolutionary not only because it aims at the heart of the sex-repressive institutions of this society. It is also revolutionary because it will break down one of the most effective barriers which society uses to foster in people a lack of confidence in their ability to control their lives. Revolutions are not made without such confidence, and gay liberation can help restore it to millions.

June 20, 1971

MOTION ON GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT PROBE  
PASSED BY 1971 CONVENTION OF THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

1) To approve the memorandum on membership policy adopted by the Political Committee on November 13, 1970.

2) To reaffirm the party's position, stated in the Political Committee motion of May 25, 1971, of unconditional support to the struggles of homosexuals for full democratic rights including full civil and human rights, and against all the forms of discrimination and oppression they suffer under capitalism.

3) To end the information gathering probe of the gay liberation movement initiated by the Political Committee on May 25, 1971.

4) To authorize the National Committee to organize, following the convention, an internal party literary discussion of the gay liberation movement and the party's orientation to it, leading to a decision by a plenum of the National Committee.



MOTION APPROVED BY SWP NATIONAL  
COMMITTEE PLENUM

The following motion was approved by the National Committee at its plenum, May 14, 1972.

(a) To open immediately following the plenum an internal party literary discussion, for a three-month period, of the gay liberation movement and the party's orientation to it, leading to a decision by the subsequent plenum of the National Committee;

(b) To authorize the incoming Political Committee to allow a limited extension of the discussion period if practical circumstances require.

CONCERNING THE GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT  
AND THE PARTY'S ORIENTATION TO IT

(Vol. 30, No. 1)

by Barry Sheppard

The purpose of this article is to help initiate the internal party literary discussion of the gay liberation movement and the party's orientation to it. The first part contains some comments on the oppression of gay people. The second part is an outline of the development of the gay liberation movement, as far as I know it. The third section presents my opinion on what the party's orientation to this movement should be at the present time.

\* \* \*

Various gay liberation and homosexual rights organizations have described the kind of oppression that homosexuals face in the United States. (See David Thorstad's article in the April 16, 1971, issue of *The Militant*.) One aspect of this oppression is the existence of reactionary and archaic laws against homosexual acts. While these laws cannot be enforced on a large scale in the population as a whole, they are used to selectively victimize gay people. The existence of these laws also sets the stage for the police and others to victimize gays in other ways, from entrapment to blackmail.

Known homosexuals face discrimination in employment. There are many employers who will not employ known or suspected gay people. Known gay people also face housing discrimination. In addition to these and other overt forms of discrimination, gay people also are subject to a special psychological oppression, resulting from the deep social prejudice against them.

Why does this oppression of gay people exist? Gays are not a class, with a special relation to the means of production, nor an oppressed nationality, nor do they

play a special role in the family or any other social structure. There is not a precise analogy, therefore, between the oppression of gays and the oppression of workers, oppressed nationalities or women. For example, the roots of the oppression of women lie in the development of the family structure in the rise of class society, which assigns a subordinate role to women within that structure and within society. Discrimination against women in other spheres is a result and extension of the subordinate role of women within the family structure. Prejudice against women is part of the ideological and moral justifications of the subordinate role of women in society, just as anti-Black prejudice and racism are part of the ideological and moral justifications of the oppression of Blacks as a nationality.

The prejudice against gay people, however, is not a direct result of a subordinate social role played by gay people—gay people play no special social role. This prejudice is directed against people whose sole distinction is that they engage in or have a preference for certain kinds of sexual acts. It is rooted in and flows from the traditional sexual morality, which disapproves of those acts and the people who engage in them. This traditional sexual morality itself is a product of the nuclear family system; it consists of guidelines of sexual conduct which help preserve the nuclear family relationships in class society.

Leaving aside all discussion about why homosexual impulses exist, or why a section of the population prefers homosexuality, which need not concern us in trying to understand the nature of the oppression of gay people, the prejudice against homosexual acts and gay people is



a by-product of the traditional sexual morality, which is the emotional and ideological glue helping hold the nuclear family together.

The discrimination against gay people, in turn, is a result of this prejudice, prejudice that is ultimately derived from that social structure known as the family— itself a product of class society.

The prejudice against gay people is inculcated—hand in hand with the compulsive sexual morality of the family system—by parents, religion, the schools, the law, quack psychiatry. This prejudice is manifested not only in the more obvious and even violent ways, as in the cases of physical attacks upon gay people by cops and others. It also results in a range of psychological oppression—from difficulties in finding a fulfilling personal life, to feelings of shame and guilt on the part of gay people. There is a fear of exposure and an attempt to hide their identity on the part of most gay people. This is a fear of not only what could be done against them by their employers or by the courts or police, but it is also a fear of social ostracism.

The struggle against the oppression of gay people is basically a democratic struggle. The motion on the gay liberation movement probe adopted by the 1971 SWP convention included the following point: "To reaffirm the party's position, stated in the Political Committee motion of May 25, 1971, of unconditional support to the struggles of homosexuals for full democratic rights, including full civil and human rights, and against all the forms of discrimination and oppression they suffer under capitalism." This summation of the party's position on the oppression of homosexuals is essentially correct in my opinion, and should be maintained.

\* \* \*

There have been two discernible phases in the rise of the gay liberation movement. In the 1950s, two organizations developed and were most prominent, the Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society, which attempted to educate people about the issue of the discrimination against homosexuals. They engaged in activities such as speaking before various groups and lobbying to change some of the discriminatory laws.

A new phase began in the later 1960s, and developed rapidly especially during the fall of 1969 and the spring of 1970, with the rise of what has been called the gay liberation movement. The gay liberation movement is an aspect of the current radicalization and developed out of it. It has tended to make a much more radical critique of society than the previously existing homosexual rights organizations did, although the development of the gay liberation movement has had an impact on both the Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society and has partially transformed these organizations in certain areas.

There are a number of factors which prepared the way for the development of the gay liberation movement.

First, there have been changes in the prevailing attitudes on homosexuality in society as a whole, together with changes in prevailing views on sexuality in general. While the prejudices remain, and they are deep, a more tolerant attitude towards homosexuals has developed. At bottom, this reflects a loosening of the hold of compulsory sexual morality that has accompanied

the growing crisis of the nuclear family.

These changes towards more tolerant attitudes concerning homosexuals have been evident in the cultural and information media in various ways, in the fact that there have been changes in the laws (in one state) and certain governmental administrative directives against aspects of the discrimination against gay people, and even in statements by some bourgeois candidates. There have been a greater number of legal challenges to aspects of discrimination against gay people. This shift in attitudes has provided an atmosphere in which such a movement could develop.

The development of more tolerant attitudes towards homosexuals has been most pronounced among radicalized young people. One aspect of the youth radicalization has been a widespread and growing questioning of repressive sexual morality. This critical attitude towards traditional morality undermines the ideological basis of the prejudice against gay people.

Under the impact of movements such as the Black liberation struggle and the women's liberation movement, radicalizing young people have begun to reject any discrimination against people for their physical or sexual characteristics. For many in this generation, opposition to the traditional repressive sexual morality and to discrimination based upon sexual characteristics is becoming the norm. This trend among the youth was reinforced by the rise of the women's liberation movement.

The women's movement itself is concerned with sexual oppression, as women are oppressed as a sex. The literature of the women's movement has analyzed and exposed the objectification of sex and the debilitating and reactionary character of traditional sexual morality, and the distortion of sexuality in capitalist society. The Marxist theory of the origin, structure and role of the family as the basis of the oppression of women has become much more widely accepted. In this context, many in the women's movement have begun to see the prejudice towards homosexuals as another facet of sexist oppression.

The women's movement not only helped pave the way for the rise of the gay liberation movement on the plane of ideas, it had to confront the question of the discrimination against homosexuals directly in the form of lesbian-baiting. The women's movement has been lesbian-baited from two sides. First, there are lesbians in the women's movement, including in leadership positions, and the movement has been baited because of this. Secondly, there is the related charge that any woman who fights for her rights is stepping out of her "place," is rejecting her "femininity," and must be a lesbian. The women's movement has by and large rejected lesbian-baiting as an attempt to divide and weaken the movement. This debate, and working with lesbians in women's groups, helped many women overcome prejudices against lesbians, and to see that this prejudice is, in part, another aspect of the oppression of all women, since it includes not only a prejudice against women engaging in sexual relations with other women but also a prejudice about what a woman's personality is supposed to be.

While these developments in the radicalization lay the ground for the rise of the gay liberation movement, this movement itself has in turn brought a higher level of understanding and consciousness of the oppression of gay people among radicalizing youth, and wider layers



The gay liberation movement has been manifest in a number of different ways, from the coming out of hidden homosexuals (some of them prominent people), to articles in the bourgeois press, to the proliferation of gay newspapers, to the organized gay liberation movement.

In 1969 and 1970, gay liberation organizations appeared in major cities and on campuses across the country. The "coming out" of organized gay liberation groups reflects a growing mood, especially among young homosexuals, to reject self-hatred and to affirm their humanity, as well as a desire to fight discrimination. There were a number of actions and demonstrations—the largest have been the Christopher Street demonstrations in 1970 and 1971.

From what we can tell from the probe of the gay liberation movement that was conducted by the party and TSA, and by what has happened since the party convention, there has been an evolution of the organized gay liberation movement. A sector of the movement developed in an ultraleft and inward-turned direction. This sector has become part of the broader ultraleft and commune-oriented youth current. In some areas, this process has resulted in the virtual disappearance of any viable organized expression of the gay movement.

This process was accompanied by splits, where there was a reaction against this ultraleftism, and where there were people who wanted to keep a movement going that would continue to fight for the rights of gay people. Thus in some areas and campuses, more stable formations have survived. The Gay Activists Alliance in New York is probably the most stable of these organizations nationally. On many campuses, some viable gay groups have continued to function. Many of these, however, seem to be, at present, concerned primarily with providing various social services and outlets for gays, although we could expect that they could be mobilized around specific struggles, should they develop. The present political orientation of these groups appears to be primarily towards the elections. One of their activities has been to confront candidates, demanding that they take positions in favor of the rights of gay people.

It's a very uneven picture throughout the country. In some places, gay liberation organizations continue to function on one level or another, while in others they are virtually nonexistent. There is no national organizational framework of gay liberation organizations. From what we know at present, it is unlikely that there will be such a national organizational framework in the near future. It also appears unlikely, given the present orientation of most gay liberation groups, that there will be

any national focus of action by gay liberation groups in the period immediately ahead.

The gay liberation movement at present encompasses a small fraction of homosexual people. It remains to be seen how extensively gay people will be mobilized to struggle for their rights, exactly what forms this struggle will take, and the tempo of the struggle.

\* \* \*

The question of what our orientation towards this movement should be at the present time has to be considered in the light of the concrete situation of this movement, and in relation to other fields of work and tasks facing the party.

In view of the present state of the organized gay liberation movement on a national scale, it is my opinion that it would be a mistake to attempt to carry out a national party intervention in the gay liberation movement at the present time. There is no national gay liberation organization which could be a focus of our intervention. There is no national action coalition around specific issues of gay oppression which we could support and help build. Any attempt by us to start from scratch and try to build such an organization or coalition would be a very difficult enterprise—in my opinion, one which would inevitably fail in the given conditions where we do not see much motion toward such formations. We cannot attempt to substitute our own small forces, in any movement, for broader forces we might like to see organized, but which are not at the present time.

Since the party convention, there have been a number of struggles around the issue of gay rights that have occurred on a local level. For example, there was a demonstration in Minneapolis last fall, reported in *The Militant*, protesting the firing of a gay person from his job at the university. This year, again, it looks as though there will be Christopher Street actions in some cities.

The tactical question of how to relate to such local developments and local gay liberation organizations will vary from branch to branch and at different times, and should be decided by the branches in light of the general overall political priorities of the party, and the resources of the branches.

Finally, given the interest in the elections on the part of most of the gay liberation movement, the position taken by the SWP election campaign on gay rights should help us reach the best of the gay activists, win them to support of our campaign, and recruit them to our full program.

June 1, 1972



# IS A PARTY THAT BANS TRANSVESTISM, READY FOR GAY LIBERATION?

(Vol. 30, No. 2)

by Sudie and Geb, Boston Branch

When the party a year and a half ago decided to allow gays to be members on the same basis as others, we took a big step forward in one of the few areas in which our movement had serious weaknesses. But we still ban transvestism within the party. The exact limits of this policy aren't completely clear, and may involve a certain amount of flexibility. It would seem that comrades who occasionally put on the clothing of the other sex in the privacy of their own home, may not be seen as violating this policy, but evidently it would not be acceptable for a comrade to wear drag to a bar or to a movement party.

At the past party convention, Comrade Sheppard, representing the Political Committee, told the gay workshop that this ban would be continued, despite the natural feeling of similarity between this ban and the ban that had been dropped. One consideration put forward, of course, is that—theoretically—transvestist members would tend to isolate us from the mass of the workers, who will retain many backward prejudices for a long time, including prejudices against transvestists.

A second consideration put forward at the time was that the desire to dress up as a member of the other sex was not a voluntary matter of taste, such as the desire to dress up in a certain style, modern fashion, etc. Rather, the PC representative told us, the desire to impersonate the other sex was an "obsession," something uncontrolled, which by inference made the victim of the obsession mentally unstable and not someone who would likely be fit for the rigors of party membership in the first place.

Neither of these arguments would receive a very favorable response within the gay liberation movement.

To begin to be involved in the gay liberation movement, even on a very low scale, while retaining this membership policy, would be extremely dangerous. This party policy would inevitably become a public issue, and would supply powerful ammunition to red-baiters within the gay movement. Reasonably enough, an organization which bans transvestists from membership would hardly seem fit to lead a movement of a community in which transvestism is so common, even to the point that transvestism and gayness are widely viewed as being logically related.

The demand for legal and social equality for transvestists would be a necessary demand of the gay liberation movement. It would be difficult for a party to lead struggles around such a demand, if the party itself did not grant transvestists equality internally.

We may grant that most gays are not transvestists, and that most transvestists are not gay. But gay people are too closely tied to transvestists, in associating together and in sharing similar forms of oppression, to ever be satisfied with an organization which banned transvestists.

## WHAT IS TRANSVESTISM?

Generally speaking, transvestism is the desire and prac-

tice of putting on the appearance of the other sex, through whatever forms of clothing, make-up, or whatever else is traditionally associated with the other sex in one's culture. With modern medical techniques, it can be taken to the extreme of physically changing one's sex, as has been done recently by many individuals such as Christine Jorgensen. These individuals, known as transexuals, are, of course, a much smaller category (perhaps 10,000 in the U.S.).

Of course, transvestism in clothing could hardly exist among nudists or in any other culture in which there were no artificial differences in traditional clothing between the sexes. So it might be true that transvestism will disappear under socialism; but then, even the antiwar movement will disappear under socialism, so this by itself is no condemnation of transvestism.

In the stricter sense, transvestism may be thought of as the practice of impersonating the other sex in order to obtain some sort of erotic pleasure. But in many cases it would be an oversimplification to say that erotic "pleasure," in the usual sense, is involved; one's motives would often be much more complicated than that. Also, when a bearded male wears a dress but doesn't shave his face, he clearly isn't making a serious attempt to pass for female, and so impersonation of the other sex is clearly only one aspect of the phenomenon.

In recent times, such a large proportion of American women often wear the sorts of slacks that are traditionally associated with men, that this type of transvestism is generally not even thought of as being transvestism; the same can be said for women wearing the extremely short haircuts which in the past were considered masculine, and for men wearing the long hair traditionally considered feminine. Those women who do make an all-out effort to pass for male may be doing so in order to be able to hold a job they couldn't hold if it were known they were female; but again, this is not what people usually have in mind in discussing transvestism.

The most common practice usually labelled "transvestism" is the phenomenon of a male who would not consider himself gay, on occasions in the privacy of his own home or at a private party, wearing a dress or in some other way dressing up as a female. Some men like to wear female underwear underneath the customary male clothing during their everyday activity, without making it known that they are doing so. In both cases, their transvestism is just a part, often just a small part, of their personal habits and customs.

The sort of transvestism people usually think of first, is the custom of some gay males doing a more thorough job of dressing up as females, when going to gay bars, gay parties, etc. Even here, this habit is usually not at all obvious in the person's everyday life; his closest friends and co-workers commonly don't even suspect that this is how he spends his Saturday nights. This practice is generally a very practical and even necessary means



establishing a sort of gay atmosphere, a difficult task in the anti-gay society we live in.

Transvestism is a widespread phenomenon, in each of its forms. In many forms, it isn't even considered unusual. Those who practice it in the forms which are considered unusual, generally do it only on occasions, specifically on occasions where it won't cause any social problems. They live otherwise "normal" lives as a whole; the occasional practice of transvestism has no necessary noticeable effect one way or the other, on the day-to-day life of the transvestist. Even those who stay in drag all the time don't necessarily run up against impossible social barriers. In particular, those who go the full limit, using hormone injections and surgery to change their sex outwardly, commonly end up leading more or less "normal" lives as members of what for them used to be the other sex.

If we are to have any policy at all concerning transvestists, in order for that policy to be serious and thoughtful it must take into account these realities of the phenomenon.

### ALIENATING THE WORKERS?

Would allowing transvestists into the party on the same basis as anyone else tend to isolate us from the working class to a significant extent?

Most transvestists are not even known to be transvestists, even among their close friends and co-workers, except for those known to be sympathetic. This factor by itself would nearly eliminate any need to worry about negative repercussions.

Of course, there is a substantial sector of the working class—the gay and transvestist workers, and those sympathetic to gays and transvestists—who presumably would be more favorable to us if we allowed transvestism within the party. With the rise of the gay liberation movement, this sector is becoming especially political, and pound-for-pound would be more important to us as a result.

The mass of the American workers, at present, probably couldn't care less whether we allow transvestism in the party or not. When the mass of a working class moves, it tends to ignore those obstacles which in the past might have been important. In the Russian working class, as in Russian society as a whole, anti-Semitism was for a long time a very widespread and powerful prejudice, one which was by no means completely eliminated during the revolution. Logically enough, reactionaries tried to Jew-bait Trotsky to isolate the Bolsheviks from the mass of the workers. But when those workers were ready to take state power, such prejudices lost all practical significance (but would the same have happened if the Bolsheviks had catered to the anti-Semitism of the masses?).

Revolutions have been lost because the workers took to arms too soon, or not soon enough, because their leadership consciously wanted to avoid a class showdown, or because they had no leadership at all. But never has a revolution been lost because the revolutionary party included some transvestists, nor for any reason remotely comparable. There is no historical evidence that this problem should be an overriding consideration for us.

In terms of current recruitment, those workers and others who are at present within our reach, would be the least

chained to backward prejudices, and the least prejudiced against those with different life-styles even where they would want no part of such a life-style for themselves. In our climate of gay liberation, cultural change and increasing toleration of differences, those potential recruits who would be blocked from becoming Trotskyists by the existence of transvestists within the party, would on the one hand be rare, and on the other hand might not yet be ready for party membership anyway.

Thus, even on the most pragmatic level, our present policy of banning transvestism within the party probably does more to isolate us from those we could reach than a policy of allowing transvestism would. Assuming that we become more and more involved in the gay liberation movement, this situation will grow worse and worse.

Such pragmatic considerations are important, and in very extreme circumstances can even be primary. But in America at present we can be very flexible. We not only have a situation of general bourgeois legality, but even more than that, we are in a situation where archaic sexual prejudices are rapidly breaking down among the masses, where the bourgeois state is losing its ability to enforce or justify its sexually repressive laws and is even being forced to repeal them in many cases. The long-term trend is emphatically in the direction of increasing tolerance of cultural diversity, in the bedroom and elsewhere. Let us note here that in the recent period perhaps the most popular comedy act in show business is Geraldine, who in reality is Flip Wilson dressed up as a female.

In such a situation we are not compelled to cater to the most backward prejudices of the masses, but rather are very free to advocate the sort of tolerance and open-mindedness that is associated with socialist consciousness, and that aids the growth of socialist consciousness. This education is an important part of our work.

### A PRECEDENT?

One important aspect of this idea of tolerance is the idea that just because someone else has a life-style or habit which is drastically different from yours, that doesn't necessarily mean that the other person's life-style or habit is an "obsession" of a mentally unstable person. In particular, transvestism is not in general an "obsession"; the Political Committee is mistaken about that.

The party once thought that gayness was obsessive—in particular, that in the repressive society we live in, gays could not be expected to be able to control their lives to the same extent that others could; therefore the party was afraid that allowing gays as members threatened to turn the party into a "therapeutic" organization (in the words of the Nov. 13, 1970 PC memorandum which dropped the ban on gays in the party). When we dropped this ban, we discovered that there had been many, many gays at all levels in the party who had been members all along. The ban hadn't as a whole kept gays out of the party, but only forced them to conceal their gayness from the party. These gay comrades had to function in an especially difficult situation within the party, just about as bad as they were likely to run into in the outside world. They were able to undergo the self-denial and abstention, the secrecy and humiliation, necessary



to conceal their gayness from their comrades. This was possible because gayness *wasn't* an obsession after all; the gay comrades had as much self-control and discipline as non-gay comrades have ever had. The rigors of being a gay person in an anti-gay society may even have made them tougher and more self-controlled than they otherwise might have been.

At this point we are willing to predict that when our ban on transvestism within the party is dropped, we will discover that many transvestists had already been members of the party as well. Like the gay comrades, the transvestist comrades have been able to conceal their transvestism from the party, because transvestism isn't an "obsession" either.

## LET THOSE WHO ARE WITHOUT SIN, CAST THE FIRST STONE

Our present policy on transvestism within the party is at least partly based on the assumption that there is some special element of "obsession" involved in transvestism. To the extent that that element is present, there is nothing special about it. Every comrade has personal needs which, under certain circumstances, can present a certain amount of obsession and interference with party work. Any comrade with normal human limitations is always in danger that the ups and downs of their erotic lives may interfere to a greater or lesser extent with their political work. It's not rare for a comrade to transfer from one branch to another—sometimes very suddenly and even where there is some problem in filling the assignments they leave vacant—because of the necessities of their erotic lives. And this certainly applies even to those comrades whose erotic habits are utterly traditional. Only very rarely does this reach the point where a comrade is forced to drop out or where the party is forced to recommend a leave of absence or resignation. Virtually every comrade and potential comrade has a potential for contributing to our work, which vastly outweighs their individual limitations and faults; and this applies to transvestists just as much as it does to traditionalists.

Is anyone alive today fit to pass judgment over any supposedly deviant style of erotic pleasure? What scientific evidence would they base themselves on? What scientific evidence is there, which in any serious way presents a condemnation of transvestism? Scientific study of the erotic side of life, has scarcely even begun. Neither the bourgeois state, nor even the SWP, is in any position to pass judgment over those whose love-making styles and erotic habits are in conflict with Western tradition.

This much can be said in favor of transvestism. It challenges the traditional, sexist sex-roles of our society; it defies those who say that This Is The Best Of All Possible Cultures, So Conform Or Else; it very much involves the search for new experiences and new answers (how educational it must be to walk down the street and have people treat you as a member of the other sex—to see how the other half lives!). To use a phrase currently popular within the party, transvestism tears down a sacred cow or two. And if we may quote from Comrade Barnes, "every time a sacred cow is cut down, it is a time for rejoicing for the Trotskyist movement."

Does this mean that transvestism is revolutionary? Insofar as having the courage, and sensing the need, to

challenge bourgeois sex roles is revolutionary—transvestism is likewise revolutionary.

Is transvestism the best way to challenge bourgeois sex-roles? Is it even a halfway effective way? Or is it well intentioned but self-defeating?

Who knows?

The party does not need to decide how good Transvestism is, if at all. This is fortunate, because we just haven't got the theoretical groundwork for such a judgment. But if the party doesn't need to endorse transvestism, it doesn't need to condemn it either. We should have no position at all on the question of the benefits or harm done by the practice of transvestism to the transvestist (we can of course agree that the practice of transvestism in no way infringes on anyone else's rights).

We especially shouldn't have the position that transvestism is an "obsession" which seriously interferes with one's functioning in life; not only is that position unrealistic, but further it can only bring us accusations that we are sexist.

If there is anyone who can safely be accused of "obsession," it is those who are insecure in their own conformism to today's majority norms, who are obsessed with the need to rationalize their own habits by condemning the non-conformist habits of others. But even this form of obsession needn't be an insurmountable barrier to party membership.

## A QUESTION

It came as a surprise to some of us to discover last August that the party had a formal policy banning transvestism. This policy—naturally—had never been, and still has never been, voted on or even discussed by a party convention. It is the sort of policy whose advocates aren't very interested in having it discussed, or else they would have brought up the subject themselves. Are there any other erotic types banned from the SWP that we don't know about? How about masochists? Exhibitionists? Boot-fetishists? Animal-lovers? Etc.?

## ANOTHER QUESTION

To an extent it seems that our present policy on transvestism assumes that all transvestists are male. This is not the case. Many gay females dress in a butch drag which would seem to be the counterpart of the drag worn by the male transvestist. Women who don't consider themselves gay still sometimes dress up in traditionally male outfits, even in suit-and-tie (various show business figures could be mentioned here). Tomboyism is a massive phenomenon. And masses of women wear traditionally male clothing or haircuts, without for a moment thinking of themselves as transvestists.

For a woman to wear traditionally male clothing or haircut might make it somewhat harder for her to reach certain layers of the working class with our program—just as various other forms of non-traditional clothing or habits might do. In this respect, also, there would seem to be little difference between female and male.

But to restrict female comrades from going too far away from traditionally female appearance (where would we draw the line?), would clearly cause much resistance. Changes in appearance are closely linked with develop-



ry—trans-... communist consciousness; to restrict women comrades  
in the regard would be far more trouble—in terms of  
the assistance of women in the party and in the mass  
movement, and in terms of a real psychological oppres-  
sion—than could possibly be justified.

For this reason the party has correctly been tolerant  
of many forms of non-traditional appearance among wom-  
en comrades. A female transvestist wearing the same drag  
as men at gay bars, would probably not be challenged  
for her appearance if she wanted to join the party.  
The party recognize the existence of female trans-  
vestism. Is our policy on transvestism the same for fe-  
male and males?

transvestism IS A LIMIT TO EVERYTHING.

transvestism Some comrades have pointed out that in real life there  
are many situations where it would be politically harm-  
ful for a comrade to sell *Militants* or otherwise repre-  
sent the party, in transvestist drag—sometimes, "suicidal"  
might be a more accurate term.

There are limits to the ways in which a white comrade  
can use our politics to the Black community, and vice-  
versa. Male comrades can hardly carry out our inter-  
nationalism in the abortion movement. Straight comrades  
are seriously limited in the ways that they can intervene  
in the gay movement.

Every gay person knows that there are situations in  
which you don't point out that you are gay. Every trans-  
vestist knows that there are situations where you don't  
wear drag. Often, you wouldn't want to wear drag while  
trying to sell *Militants* to white construction workers, un-  
less you could successfully pass for the other sex with-  
out arousing any suspicions.

But things aren't all bad. The type of person who goes  
to the SA, SMC, or other movement parties, usually could  
handle any negative reactions they might have to seeing  
someone in drag at the party, and some positive educa-  
tional might even result. Presumably wearing drag while inter-  
vening at a gay liberation event, would have positive  
effects of it made any difference at all. Wearing drag at  
a gay bar, whether you're there for social or political  
purposes, would seem pretty realistic.

Guys in drag have sold gay liberation newspapers in  
Cambridge's Harvard Square without serious problems,

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and presumably transvestist comrades could get away  
with selling *The Militant* in drag there, on Berkeley's  
Telegraph Avenue, at most political college campuses,  
almost anywhere in Greenwich Village, and in similar  
places, without intolerable repercussions and maybe even  
with some benefits.

Those who best know the limits of what transvestists  
can get away with in our liberal repressive society, are  
the transvestists themselves; they know from experience.  
They know how much they have to fear losing their jobs  
or being evicted from their homes. They know how ir-  
rational people's responses are in the various different  
situations. They don't need to be locked up in the closet  
by others; they have their own experiences, and their  
own instinct for self-preservation, to guide them.

## IN SUMMARY.

A basic axiom of the gay liberation movement is that  
the well-being of all people requires a climate of tolerance  
of diversity, in which today's minority is not suppressed,  
but treated instead as a potential future majority—a  
climate in which the only limitation on a person's free-  
dom, erotic or otherwise, is that they may not infringe  
on the rights of others.

In order to have any chance of gaining the respect  
of the gay liberation movement—and in order to deserve  
that respect—the SWP must energetically teach this con-  
cept. But in order to preach it, we'll have to practice it.

Our present policy on transvestism is not yet generally  
known about outside the party. If we become active in  
the gay liberation movement without changing that policy,  
however, that is sure to change; our policy on transvest-  
ism is sure to become a very public issue, and it will  
discredit us badly. At that point, even if we then changed  
the policy, the distrust would endure.

We must act now. We must allow transvestists into the  
party, as individuals, on the same basis as all others,  
without unrealistic and unnecessary restrictions. Until we  
make that change, we aren't ready for the gay libera-  
tion movement.

June 6, 1972



"I'm not willing just to be tolerated. That wounds my love of love and of liberty."

—Jean Cocteau

## INTRODUCTION

All oppressed social layers initially hold this in common: they do not realize that they are oppressed, and once they become aware that they are, they do not have confidence that they can do anything about it. Naturally, the ruling class and the institutions it oversees do their best to maintain the oppressed in a state of paralysis and powerlessness: Blacks are treated as the inferiors of whites, women are taught to be domestic slaves, the workers are told they are John D. Rockefeller and that the country belongs to them, etc.

Gays are told, among other things, that they are a small bunch of weirdos who can't hack heterosexuality. Never mind the fact that the exclusive life-time homosexual constitutes a rather small percentage of the gay population—that rigid adherence to exclusive sexual norms is a more heterosexual phenomenon than a gay phenomenon. This is not only not widely known, it is generally considered irrelevant. It is considered irrelevant because the sexually repressive institutions of this society do not allow for homosexual behavior with *any* frequency, under *any* circumstances, in either sex, or at any age.

As a result, the anguish gays are forced to undergo is seen as a function of a personal affliction that ought to be avoided, not as oppression induced by a sexually repressive society that needs to be changed. Gays are encouraged to turn their oppression and anger in on themselves, not outward at the society in which that oppression is so deeply rooted.

Redirecting that anger is no easy task because the taboo on homosexual behavior is surrounded by such fear and ignorance. For not only has patriarchal society confiscated humanity's freedom of sexual expression, but it legitimizes that theft by getting those who have been robbed—all of us—to go along with it. Ignorance and fear of reprisal—whether in this life or in the next—are the main vehicles for accomplishing this.

Gays face difficulties no other oppressed sector faces in attempting to discover who they are. For instance, the oppressor is able to maintain his myth that we are a tiny minority by the fact that, unlike women and Blacks, who are at least identifiable to each other, we look like the oppressor. Therefore, we are able to pass for straight—not because straights are clearly identifiable, of course, but because in this society you are assumed to be straight until proven guilty. Gays are not only like fish in a sea, but in a sense we are also the sea. Homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is not an identifiable condition but merely one form of sexual behavior. But—and a big but it is, indeed!—unlike heterosexuality, it is a form of sexual behavior that our society does not accept.

Another special difficulty gays face is the prevailing notion that in order to have an objective or even interesting opinion about homosexuality, you have to be heterosexual. Even liberal-minded persons who would not think of disqualifying a woman as a source of knowledge on what it is like to be a woman or a Black on what it is like to be Black often do not hesitate to do precisely that when it comes to gays. When gays exhibit concern over something that means as much to them as the homosexuality, they are still knowingly dismissed as people with an axe to grind.

This is what Arno Karlen does, for example, in his recently published book *Sexuality and Homosexuality* which is being pushed by Book-of-the-Month Club and which is immodestly presented as "the definitive explanation of human sexuality, normal and abnormal." Though he is able to dismiss such a pioneer in the scientific study of homosexuality as Magnus Hirschfeld (on whose work the Bolsheviks based their discussion of homosexuality in the Soviet Encyclopedia) "because [!] he was himself a homosexual and occasional transvestite, known affectionately in Berlin's gay world as 'Auntie Magnesia.'"

Few authorities that the gay person might turn to in the society for information about how we fit in tell us anything except that if we want a role in the play we'd better first straighten out—or else. This goes for the most humble authorities, beginning with our parents, all the way up to the celibate Judeo-Christian god, who has an uncommonly fierce distaste for our vice (in contrast, say, to the gods of the Greeks, who were said to have been responsible for introducing mortals to the joys of homosexuality).

With few exceptions (Sappho, Genet, Gertrude Stein . . .), most of our gay brothers and sisters who have made some noteworthy intellectual contribution to Western civilization and culture (Plato, Michelangelo, Gide, Proust, Shakespeare, Alexander the Great, E.M. Forster—the list would have to include virtually every important figure in history who was known to be gay) are said to have made their contribution *in spite of* their homosexuality. Since it is never assumed that homosexuality could be a positive factor in anyone's life, it is as though society were doing us a favor by submerging the sexual identity of history's homosexual greats; why should one want to be reminded of things one is trying to forget?

All oppressed groups need to discover their history and culture. The contribution of great women and Blacks has most often been simply ignored. Where possible, the history of gays has been dressed up and masqueraded as the contribution of heterosexuals. There is a reason for this. The proper idols for the oppressed are idols the oppressor finds acceptable. I'll never forget how shocked I was and how proud, when more than ten years ago I first read Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and discovered that someone who was widely considered one of the greatest American poets was **not only homosexual**, but he actually wrote about it with something like the joy I myself feel. Most gay writers have not done this. Many had to give



to the prevailing heterosexual norms and write "in drag" (changing up their characters as the opposite sex) in order to be published. Love in Western literature is still limited to the heterosexual variety.

There have of course always been gays who have fought prevailing heterosexual norms in bed, never before taken to the streets to demand equal rights with heterosexually oriented persons. The logic of their prevailing fight, however, is not merely to fight for civil rights even if tolerated, but for full human rights and acceptance and the positive integration of homosexual behavior would be the liberated society of the future. Theirs is a struggle to win back the sexual freedom confiscated and perverted by class society. This raises the question of how homosexual oppression is conceived and how it is built into the needs of class society. In other words, is the relation between class struggle and the struggle for gay liberation?

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How did homosexual oppression come about? The question is of obvious importance to Marxists: to fight for a world free of oppression you have to understand the nature of the oppression that is a part of the world you are trying to change. Obvious and important though the question is, however, it is not an easy one to answer because of the very nature of the subject of homosexuality: the "love that dare not speak its name" has also been deemed unworthy of serious study—by Marxists no less than anyone else.

Thus, for instance, no known study has yet been done of the historical, economic, and social origins of the oppression against homosexuality. Very little is known about homosexuality before the rise of class society and recorded history. Much of the little that has been recorded by moderns about homosexuality in primitive societies has been distorted by the prejudice of eyes trained to see—and to not see—by Judeo-Christian moral standards.

Despite the general lack of information on this subject, however, enough is known about the rise of class society in Western Europe to make it possible to shed some light on the origins of homosexual oppression; and enough is known about the legal and religious forms the oppression of homosexuals has taken for us to be able to trace the intensity of the antigay phobia in present-day American society back to its cultural roots.

## ORIGINS OF HOMOSEXUAL OPPRESSION

The search for an understanding of the origins of homosexual oppression, while difficult, fortunately does not need to be begun entirely from scratch. The foundations have already been laid in the contributions of such persons as Morgan, Engels, Malinowski, Wilhelm Reich, and Evelyn Reed.

The existing historical materialist analysis of the rise of sexual repression—as a key component of the process whereby matriarchal society was replaced by patriarchal society, whereby primitive communism gave way to increasingly complex forms of class society—is perfectly adequate for explaining how the attempt to suppress homosexual behavior came to be necessary. Of course, this analysis of the rise of sexual repression and class society

has never been made with the origins of homosexual oppression in mind. (In fact, when researchers have not simply ignored the question of homosexuality altogether, they have been inclined more often to look for causes of homosexuality than for the causes of homosexual oppression.) This of course does not make the historical materialist method, or the contribution of those who have used it, any less valid. It merely means that their analysis needs to be expanded to include a facet of the topic that, perhaps because of shortsightedness inflicted on them by their epoch, they have tended to overlook.

It is not my purpose to attempt to undertake a comprehensive discussion of this topic, though this certainly should be done. I would like only to present some initial thoughts, which, however obvious in light of what is known about the transition between primitive communism and class society, have nevertheless not found their way into any discussion of it that I have seen.

Let me add parenthetically that I do this not because I consider myself especially qualified for the task, but, quite simply, because it has to be done.

### *The Family*

The origins of homosexual oppression can be traced to the rise of the patriarchal family and the repressive sexual restrictions, the subjugation of women, the (heterosexual) male supremacy, and the inequalities of the reign of private property that go along with it. Homosexual behavior was not always suppressed. During the matriarchal period of human prehistory—prior to the introduction of sexual restraints, the confiscation of sexual freedom and sexual equality by the new, male rulers of patriarchal society—there was no more need to impose restrictions on homosexual behavior than there was to regulate heterosexual behavior in accord with an incest taboo, to forcibly impose the authority of the husband and the (male) chief upon women, or to practice painful genital mutilations like clitorectomies and circumcision during puberty as an aid to enforcing premarital chastity.

The transition from matriarchy to patriarchy, says Reich in *The Invasion of Compulsory Sex Morality*, consists of the following:

"1. The transition of power from woman to man. Thereby the power displacement grows vertically, according to rank. The chief, in contrast to the citizen, has the most power; his wives have the least.

"2. The transition from natural genital love life to the compulsory marriage bond.

"3. The transition from sex-affirmation to sex-negation, from the affirmation of premarital genital activity to a demand for premarital asceticism. And finally the most important thing:

"4. The growing division of society into oppressing upper groups and oppressed lower groups."

This transition is one which <sup>not</sup> only requires the enforced constriction of sexual expression in general but it is one with which homosexual behavior stands in particular conflict. This can most clearly be seen by looking at the requirements of the institution that developed as the end-product of this process—the patriarchal family.

It is because homosexual behavior threatens the proper functioning of the patriarchal family that it needs to be regulated, persecuted, and in some cases, if possible, eliminated. (The degree of persecution varies, depending on the period and the culture, but the underlying conflict



between homosexuality and the family remains.) The essential functions of this institution with which homosexuality comes into conflict would seem to be the following:

1. *As a unit for transferring inheritance in patriarchal society and for maintaining the family line.* This not only enforces chastity and monogamy upon women (so the father can be certain his heirs are his own), but the prospect of inheritance binds the sons more closely to their fathers and makes them more willing to accept paternal authority, thereby enhancing the authority of the father over the sons.

2. *As a reproduction unit for supplying a labor force and fighting men, as well as a reserve army of labor consisting of women.* Marriage becomes a duty to one's ancestors, whose family line must be perpetuated, and to the tribe. Women are married off as a matter of course since their purpose is reproduction. A man who evades his reproductive responsibilities to his family and tribe tends to be looked upon with hostility or suspicion.

Homosexual behavior, of course, does not now and never did constitute a great threat to reproduction *per se*. In a society free of sexual restraints, it simply co-existed and overlapped with heterosexual behavior. But with patriarchal society, reproduction within the framework of the family institution becomes a socially imposed duty; homosexuality, being both an unpredictable element and a nonproductive form of sexuality, tends to be regarded as antisocial.

3. *As a unit for instilling the proper ideological outlook in children.* It is in the family that the sex-typing and rigidly delineated sex roles are first learned, and with them the proper attitude of submissiveness to paternal authority on the part of the women and children. The patriarchal family is designed not to protect but to prevent the free expression of sexuality.

The nuclear family is a heterosexual unit. As such it attempts to suppress normal homosexual impulses in all of its members. The inability of this institution to provide any opportunity for the expression of this natural side of human sexuality is one of the things wrong with it.

The rigid definitions of sex role and sexual identity that take shape with the patriarchal family constitute a tyrannical straitjacket on the polymorphous nature of human sexuality and temperament. The straitjacket is a heterosexual one, and all the institutions of patriarchal class society are geared toward seeing to it that people stay in it. Homosexual behavior, by its very nature, does not.

### *Sex for Fun, Not Reproduction*

One of the most important reasons why homosexuality came into conflict with patriarchal society is that its sole goal is pleasure. The stability of patriarchal society required the elimination of pleasure as the primary purpose of sexuality. Pleasure was subordinated to reproduction as a justification for sex.

Unlike heterosexuality—which, while also originally engaged in for pleasure, nevertheless brought about a perpetuation of the species as a by-product—homosexuality was a purely nonproductive form of sexuality. It was engaged in for fun only. As a result, its purpose could not be subverted and given a new meaning by a sex-negative society.

The Christian notion that sex is an evil to be avoided by the godly but tolerated in the weak, and the teleo-

logical notion that sex is pleasurable so that people can be induced to reproduce, say a lot about the extent to which a sex-repressive society destroys healthy heterosexual behavior. But while heterosexual sex has come to at least be tolerated, if only as a necessary evil, homosexual sex has generally been suppressed as an insolent and unnecessary evil. Moralists who extol the sex-repressive heterosexual norms of patriarchal society tell those who will listen that sex for pleasure is "degenerate," "amoralistic," "uncivilized," etc.

### *The Virility-Aggressivity Equation*

With the concentration of wealth in the hands of the male sex that occurred during the transition to patriarchy arose a need to redefine sex in terms of roles that related to property ownership and social status. Women and gays became the victims of this redefinition.

Engels called the overthrow of the matriarchy the "world historic defeat of the female sex." But the social degradation and domestic servitude that became the lot of women with the triumph of the patriarchy went together with a new sexual degradation as well. For it appears that with the social downfall of women came a change in the woman's position in coitus: Both Kinsey and Reich point out that in primitive society, the woman's usual position was not below the man but on top of him, in a squatting position. And while this shift to the lower position probably occurred because of social and cultural considerations of dominance and submission, it quite possibly also had something to do with anatomical considerations: perhaps primitive women preferred this top position because of the greater freedom of movement and clitoral stimulation it afforded and from the greater pleasure they obtained from the deeper penetration of the penis.

Whatever the case, the passive-active stereotype of sexual intercourse that came to prevail in patriarchal society entailed a humiliating and degrading concept of the role of women in the heterosexual sex act. Perhaps it is to this that we can trace the fact that patriarchal society has always tended to take a more negative view of the so-called "passive" participant in male sodomy. There is apparently no lower rank to which a male can stoop in a male supremacist society than to imitate the position of a woman in coitus. In some societies that had slavery (ancient Egypt, for example), defeated enemies were often sodomized by the victors in what was undoubtedly seen not primarily as an act of pleasure but as a way of humiliating the conquered. Even today in the Muslim countries of the Middle East, where homosexuality has always met with greater tolerance than in the Judeo-Christian West, it is the "passive" partner in male sodomy who is especially scorned.

Can not a hint of the common origins of the oppression of women and gays be detected in this tendency of patriarchal society to equate virility and aggressivity, superiority and supremacy?

An interesting example of how seriously the ruling class takes the need to preserve its male supremacist norms and how conscious it is of the relationship between homosexuality and the subordinate role class society assigns to women can be found in the way the British ruling class met the shaking up of sex roles that was beginning to occur with industrialization (which undermines the au-



people can... extent... hetero... has come... ail, homo... insolent... ex-repres... tell those... ate," "an... of the patriarch, and which squeezes out domestic... and provides the basis for women to become wage... and to begin to free themselves from dependence... men). In 1885, just a few years after the Married... Women's Property Act, one of the first important steps... ward in the emancipation of women, the Criminal Law... amendment Act was passed making private homosexual... of "gross indecency" (not buggery, which already... and bring a life sentence) a crime for the first time, ... to a maximum of two years imprisonment with... labor.

### Mammalian Heritage

Human beings during the prehistorical period obviously... did not write down or otherwise preserve for posterity... what they did and thought as far as sex was con... ed. But since it was a period free of sexual restraints—... incest—we can assume that they were limited... by their imagination and by what they found en... able. This should lay to rest any question about... whether or not primitives engaged in homosexual acts.

If course, even the least knowledgeable person can au... ritatively assert that primitives engaged in heterosexual... —if they hadn't, we would not, among other things, ... in a position to hold this discussion. Gays, to be sure, ... not (but why should they feel the need to?) use this ... of argument in any effort to show that our primitive ... ancestors did indeed indulge in homosexual sex, and ... hereby feel we have somehow justified our sexual ori... nation. But such an argument is never used following ... any objective investigation of the subject; rather, it is ... a contribution made by some leftists to the already long ... and tedious lineup of alleged "proofs" of the superiority ... of heterosexuality. In reality, the notion that homosexual ... behavior has not always coexisted with heterosexual be... navior but instead first developed as one of the hangups ... spawned by class society is nothing more than a vari... ation on a theme that a sex-repressive society has ... worked to death in its campaign to stamp out the blight ... of homosexuality.

Homosexual behavior has played a role in human ... societies since the beginning of human history. It occurs ... in societies that encourage it, it occurs in those that mere... ly tolerate it, and it occurs in those that attempt to sup... press it. The reason for this ubiquitous nature of homo... sexual behavior is that it is not a deviant form of sexual... but simply one form that the expression of the normal ... human sexual drive takes. This universal appeal of ho... mosexuality itself explains the intensity of the measures ... that have been taken to combat it.

Homosexuality is a natural expression of human sex... ual potential and belongs to the mammalian heritage of ... general sexual responsiveness. "The homosexual has been ... a significant part of human sexual activity ever since the ... dawn of history, primarily because it is an expression ... of capacities that are basic in the human animal," ob... served Kinsey.

And not only the human animal, it might be added, ... but animals in general. People unaware of the investiga... tions of scientists into the matter used to argue that ho... mosexual behavior was "unnatural" because chimpanzees ... didn't do it. Aside from the fact that it could be argued ... that chimpanzees don't play chess or do a lot of other ... things human beings do either, the fact is that when they

were observed, it was found that homosexual behavior ... was actually something that they could be said to hold ... in common with humans. Indeed, two authorities on ani... mal sexuality—the anthropologist Clellan S. Ford and ... the psychologist Frank A. Beach in their cross-cultural ... and cross-species study *Patterns of Sexual Behavior*—con... clude that the tendency toward homosexual behavior "is ... inherent in most if not all mammals including the human ... species."

This subject was discussed by Kinsey too, who noted: ... "It may be true that heterosexual contacts outnumber ... homosexual contacts in most species of mammals, but ... it would be hard to demonstrate that this depends upon ... the 'normality' of heterosexual responses, and the 'ab... normality' of homosexual responses. In actuality, sex... ual contacts between individuals of the same sex are known ... to occur in practically every species of mammal which ... has been extensively studied."

Psychiatrists who wonder "What causes homosexuality?" ... are asking the wrong question. (The very fact that they ... never ask "What causes heterosexuality?" of course be... trays their heterosexual bias and serves to justify their ... use of the most extreme methods—including torture ... through electric shock treatments—to force their gay cli... ents into a heterosexual mold.) The question that should ... be asked is not "What causes homosexuality?" but "What ... causes society, including its 'scientific' lackeys, to attempt ... to suppress homosexuality?" The answer lies in the sex... ual repression endemic to patriarchal society.

### Engels and Reich on Homosexuality

The task of shedding light on the true nature of homo... sexual oppression and the revolutionary potential of the ... struggle for gay liberation is not made easier by the fact ... that erroneous notions about homosexuality crept into ... the work of two of the most original and important con... tributors toward explaining the relationship between sex... ual oppression and class struggle—Engels and Reich.

In the *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the ... State*, Engels says that the Greeks "fell into the abomi... nable practice of sodomy and degraded alike their gods ... and themselves with the myth of Ganymede" (a charm... ing myth about a boy whose beauty prompts Zeus to ... abduct him for purposes of carnal pleasure); he describes ... the Germanic peoples, in an obvious reference to homo... sexuality, as being "morally much deteriorated," particu... larly from their migratory contact with nomads around ... the Black Sea from whom they acquired not only great ... skills in horsemanship, but also "gross, unnatural vices"; ... and in his discussion of the modern notion of individual ... sex love, he appears to brush aside as a weakness what ... was really a strength of the gay who, along with Sappho, ... really founded the literary genre of lyric poetry—the "clas... sical love poet of antiquity, old Anacreon"—as someone ... to whom "sexual love in our sense mattered so little that ... it did not even matter to him which sex his beloved was."

These views are more naive than they are malicious ... (Engels' views on sodomy—which even heterosexuals can ... and do do—certainly strike us today as embarrassingly ... naive and even prudish). Though backward, they should ... nevertheless be regarded with some degree of tolerance. ... After all, his *Origin of the Family* appeared prior to ... the work of Freud and at a time (1884) when the sci... entific study of sexual behavior was only beginning to ... get under way.



One cannot, however, be so generous in the case of Wilhelm Reich.

Reich strongly opposed persecution of gays or attempts on the part of heterosexuals to force them to go straight. And he supported civil rights for gays; the German Association for Proletarian Sex Politics, for example, which he created in 1931 and which attained a membership of some 20,000 persons, contained as one of the officially stated aims of its platform the abolition of laws against homosexuality. Yet Reich's position on homosexuality never went beyond the kind of infuriating paternalism one finds among some exclusive heterosexuals who wear their willingness to tolerate gays as a badge entitling them to persist in their unfounded belief in the natural superiority of heterosexuality.

Actually, Reich's views on homosexuality, which he did not make any attempt to hide, probably did as much harm as good to the cause of sexual liberation.

When it came to homosexuality, Reich violated his own conviction that moral standards had no place in judging sexual behavior. In her biography of Reich, Ilse Ollendorff Reich points out that "he never knowingly accepted a homosexual for treatment," for example. When a "very worthy professional man" who was once referred to him for training turned out to be gay, Reich not only refused to accept him but said: "Ich will mit solchen Schweinereien nichts zu tun haben" (I don't want to have anything to do with such filth). This antigay moral standard permeates his writings on the subject.

The most extensive statement of Reich's views on homosexuality that I know of is to be found in his pamphlet *The Sexual Struggle of Youth*. This is a sort of primer of sex education, written in 1932 for the propaganda organizations of the German Communist youth.

Homosexuality, he says, is a "deviation of sexual development, and as a result is not a product of natural causes." While he accepts the Freudian concept of an inherent human bisexuality, and while he recognizes that "as far as their physical makeup is concerned, most homosexuals are completely normal," he also makes an unacceptable concession to the sex-repressive norms of heterosexual society by subscribing to the conflicting notions that heterosexuality is both natural and superior, whereas homosexuality is a "deviation," a "result of a defective sexual development during early childhood, involving very quickly an experience of great disappointment in the opposite sex." He states his simplistic belief that males become homosexual in order to cope with the feeling that their love for a harsh mother has been rejected; in the case of lesbians, it is the father who rejects their love. He believes (although it is not true) that "every homosexual can cease to have such feelings thanks to psychic treatment of a quite precise nature, whereas it never occurs that an individual who has developed normally will become homosexual as a result of the same treatment." (One can only ask in exasperation whether Reich is aware that such "treatment" is never used on individuals who have "developed normally.")

Even homosexuals who show no signs of neurosis or maladjustment but on the contrary are completely satisfied with their sexual orientation are to be pitied, suggests Reich in one of the more arrogant passages: "Many homosexuals who have learned to accept their deviation and who feel at ease with their life style object to the

fact that homosexuality is considered to be an evil or the result of a deviation of sexual development. They see in this a disparagement of their sexual orientation. . . . Above all, young people must be spared from definitively turning toward homosexuality, not for moral reasons, but for reasons of pure sexual economy; it can in fact be verified, that the sexual satisfaction of the healthy heterosexual individual is more intense than the sexual satisfaction of the healthy homosexual."

One would be curious to know just what steps Reich took to "verify" the superiority of heterosexuality. One can safely assume, however, that he did not consult any happy homosexuals or bisexuals in his rush to preach the superiority of the heterosexual orgasm.

The fact that this is the kind of statement one might expect to hear from someone who regards gays as "filth" (however "healthy") does not make one any more inclined to tolerate it. Indeed, it is against the harm done by precisely such attitudes as Reich's that the gay liberation movement is struggling.

Reich's belief in the superiority of heterosexuality is not based on either scientific investigation or, it appears, personal experience. It is rooted in a purely mystical faith that is uncharacteristic of most of his early work. In *The Invasion of Compulsory Sex Morality*, for instance, he repeatedly describes this notion with such unscientific terms as "natural genital embrace" (read: penis in vagina), "normal genital goal" (read: exclusive heterosexuality) etc.

Starting from his subjective premise that the heterosexual orgasm is more "satisfying" than the homosexual one, Reich deduces that homosexuality did not occur among primitive people whose sex-positive environment prevented them from choosing something second best: "Among primitive peoples, who lead a satisfying and tranquil sex life, and who do not prevent sexual development among the children, homosexuality—except [?—D. T.] in its spiritual form, friendship—does not exist." (*Sexual Struggle of Youth*) Reich regards this argument as the clincher in his case for the superiority of heterosexuality; he remains oblivious to the fact that his premise is both faulty and absurd (who but god has the authority to lay down laws on what is "sexually satisfying"?); he therefore fails to see that the very freedom of sexual development that he associates with primitive society itself precludes the limiting of sexual expression to the confines of an exclusive heterosexuality that first reared its head later, as part of the sex-repressive requirements of the new patriarchal society.

Reich does not take complete credit for this idea: "According to the most recent research of Malinowski, the English ethnologist, homosexuality appears among primitives only to the extent that the missionaries—these forerunners of capital—begin to introduce Christian morality into natural sexual life and to separate the sexes." The research Reich is referring to was presented in Malinowski's *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1930), which Reich incorporated into his *Invasion of Compulsory Sex Morality* (1931).

Malinowski's own heterosexual bias is typical of the attitude of many Western scientists who observe primitives. The fact that their explanations of what they see are sometimes thoroughly immersed in the sex-repressive perspective of the Judeo-Christian tradition does nothing



to enhance the credibility of their observations. In the case of Malinowski, this shortsightedness meshed perfectly with Reich's own mystical notion of the superiority of the homosexual orgasm.

Among the Trobriander Islanders, Malinowski says they begin their sexual exploration at a very early age, long before they are able really to carry out the act of sex. As they "satisfy their curiosity" about the sex, they indulge in genital manipulation and such "perversions" as oral stimulation. "As they are unimpressed by the authority of their elders and unbound by any moral code, except that of specific tribal custom, there is *nothing but their degree of curiosity, or passion, and of 'temperament' or sensuality, to determine* much or how little they shall indulge in sexual passion." (My emphasis—D. T.)

But yet Malinowski says later on: "It is fully confirmed among the Trobrianders that free sex life does not allow any homosexuality to form there. It cropped up in the islands only with the influence of white man, more especially of white man's morality. The boys and girls at the Mission Station, penned in separate and strictly guarded houses . . . had to help themselves out as best they could, since that which every Trobriander looks upon as his due and right was denied to them. According to very careful inquiries made on non-missionary as well as missionary natives, homosexuality is the rule among those upon whom white man's morality has been forced, and with an irrational and unscientific manner."

Does Malinowski (and by extension Reich) expect us to believe that the curiosity of the primitive Trobrianders was inferior to that of chimpanzees and other lower mammals who have no contact with Christian missionaries? Or subhuman primates and humans living in class society have homosexuality in common, while it remains alien to primitive humans? Is homosexuality something that was imposed on previously happy exclusive heterosexuals? Can we really believe that the variety of sexual experience homosexual behavior affords arose only with the imposition of sexual restrictions? Is variety of sexual experience compatible with sexual restriction and taboo, or does it thrive in a state of sexual freedom? Is exclusive homosexuality really the full expression of social and sexual freedom?

To ask these questions is, admittedly, in some degree to answer them. But the very fact that they need to be asked at all with regard to someone like Reich, who tolerated homosexuality (although he found it distasteful) and supported civil rights for homosexuals (as a socialist and democrat), is an eloquent illustration of the fact that the liberation of gay people involves much more than the mere guarantee that we will be tolerated, that laws discriminating against us will be eliminated, that we will no longer be burned at the stake, involuntarily castrated, murdered, ostracized, or viewed by straights with that "there-but-for-god-go-I" look. For tolerance is relatively easy; everybody at least likes to be regarded as tolerant ("Why some of my best friends are . . .").

But gay liberation does not involve a struggle of misfits to be treated not as criminals but as misfits. Gay liberation involves the winning of full human rights and freedom of sexual expression not just for ourselves, but for everyone. It means freeing the full sexual capacities of all of us (including those of us who have already,

for whatever reasons, rejected the exclusive heterosexual norms of patriarchal society, but who are by no means yet the free human beings we all want to become, as well as those who are still desperately clinging to the norms of exclusive heterosexuality). Ultimately, it involves a struggle for sexual liberation in general.

This is not an esoteric or exotic struggle but one with significant links to the class struggle.

## HOMOSEXUAL LIBERATION AND CLASS STRUGGLE

Sexual oppression and the imposition of sexual restrictions are at the origins of the development of class oppression. And the struggle against sexual oppression has a role to play in the elimination of class oppression. The fact that the effects of thousands of years of the suppression of freedom of sexual expression will be totally eliminated only with the elimination of class society does not diminish the relevance of the sexual liberation struggle today to the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat for socialism. On the contrary, it enhances that relationship and enriches the struggle for socialism. In addition, a special significance is conferred upon the sexual liberation struggle by the fact that the revolutionary act of taking ownership of the means of production out of the hands of the capitalist class, while of course essential, is not sufficient to automatically bring about sexual emancipation and eradicate the attitudes inculcated over millenia.

"Sexual suppression is one of the cardinal ideological means by which the ruling class subjugates the working population," wrote Reich. The fact that the majority of people are still not aware of this does not make it any less true. And the fact that most people today think of homosexuality in terms of the lies and fears imposed by an exclusively heterosexual society does not mean they always will. The gay liberation movement has a contribution to make to their developing awareness. It is a contribution that will tend both to undermine some key props of capitalist society and strengthen the combativity of millions.

The fact that this struggle does not necessarily take place around issues traditionally associated with the trade-union movement in no way reduces its significance for the revolutionary movement. For the issue of sexual oppression that it raises is one that is not merely of interest but of vital concern to everyone. With perhaps a slight exaggeration, Reich put his finger on this when he noted that "Whereas economic misery affects only a small segment of society, sexual misery encompasses all social strata." And the economic deprivation of the poor and the working masses certainly does nothing to ease their sexual misery, cramming them together in the antisexual tinderboxes of the mongamous nuclear family. The special vendetta of patriarchal society against homosexual behavior is an important aspect of the sexual misery of millions.

The nuclear family is a microcosm of society. It is there that children learn the sex roles necessary for proper functioning in capitalist society; it is there that they learn how to be the kind of punctual bootlickers that make good and well-adjusted workers like their father. He may not be aware that capitalist society has taken away his



ability to control his destiny in exchange for the responsibility of properly training his children to grow up to be as subservient to the authority of capital as he is. He may not be aware that his tyrannical ban on the free development and expression of the sexuality of his children is a socially necessary task whose subsequent reinforcement society has entrusted to ponderous and complex institutions—religion, the law, schools, the mass media, the police, psychiatry. He no doubt does not know that his dread of finding signs of homosexuality among his children is not rooted in any natural response of the organism to danger but in thousands of years of diligent efforts by patriarchal society to extirpate it and in his own awareness of such impulses in himself. He may not realize that his own sexual misery, while sometimes exacerbating the neuroses of his children, is a necessary ingredient in the proper execution of his task. He may not even be aware of his own sexual misery or that all this need not be.

### *Sex Typing*

One of the strongest implements society uses to mould the growing child into acceptable social forms and to keep people there as adults is the coercion to behave like a member of one's own sex (to be a *real* man, to be *really* feminine). Anyone who deviates from these norms is quickly labeled "queer." Gay people do not fit into these sex roles in one key way: They violate the norm of exclusive heterosexuality that underlies them.

These heterosexual sex stereotypes and definitions not only have nothing whatever to do with real human potential; they are also reflections of the social needs of the dominant, capitalist society, and they change as those needs change. With the rise of entrepreneurial capitalism, for instance, the rugged individual was the ideal—at least the male ideal. Today there are no more entrepreneurs to speak of and the rugged individual image is no longer useful. In today's consumer society, it is not people with initiative who are needed, but rather people who lack it, people who follow orders—whether it be buying detergent or killing Communists in Vietnam or hating homosexuals. In a technologically advanced, complex stage of imperialism, the male ideal is the astronaut, the mechanized, unthinking robot.

These images change for women, too. During the second world war, when the capitalists needed to tap the reserve army of labor to which women belong, the image projected for women was not that of today's happy housewife, content with the unrewarding labor of a home-centered life. No woman today who refuses to play dumb and pretend that she likes being denied the opportunity to develop as a free human being, independent of a man, will for long escape the accusation that she too is "queer." (This is the source of some of the lesbian baiting of the women's liberation movement.)

These sex stereotypes are used not only to sell the products of a consumer society. They are used to keep people in line. If you spend all your energy trying to conform to this society's warped and rigid definitions of a "real man" and a "real woman"—and both straights and closeted gays spend enormous amounts of energy doing precisely that—then you will have none left for the struggle to overthrow the society that imposes those definitions upon you.

### *Most Gays Are Workers*

The struggle for gay liberation is not relevant to the struggle of working people for socialism merely because in a general sense the enemy of both is the same. It is of much more immediate relevance as well because millions of workers are gay. Although homosexual behavior occurs in all classes, it is most widespread among the working class, if for no other reason than that most people in our society are workers. In addition, Kinsey statistics would suggest that the percentage of gays is higher among the lower social strata. (This is, of course, not to belittle the fact that homosexuality, while this society finds no way to integrate in a positive fashion into its institutions, is found in the middle and upper classes. Actually, with the growth of the gay liberation movement, this ubiquitous nature of homosexuality may itself aid the undermining of bourgeois moral values and institutions.)

It is true that most gay workers are not visibly gay. Except for a few professions (and even in these, gay people still run certain risks, as the firing of Michael McConnell from his job as a librarian at the University of Minnesota showed), it is still occupational suicide for most gays to disclose their sexual orientation. Their secrecy is a matter of survival. But it is a secrecy that none of us ever willingly chose but that was instead thrust upon us by the institutions of a sick heterosexual society.

Many gay workers can undoubtedly be persuaded to come out and shed this secrecy. Perhaps many never will. But even those who stay in their closets may very well be inspired by the gay liberation movement to greater combativity in other areas—as workers, as Blacks, as Chicanos, as women, etc.

### *What is Gay Liberation All About Anyway?*

The oppression gays suffer is not primarily economic though we usually do suffer economic deprivation or job-related anxiety as a result of the antigay discrimination promoted by an exclusively heterosexual society. We are not oppressed because of our role in the family (though the fact that we belong to this unit—as fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles . . .—is certainly one important aspect of our oppression) but because the family structure and the institutions of patriarchal society do not allow any room for homosexual behavior; in a sense we are oppressed because we have defected from our intended social roles. We are not oppressed because we constitute a behavioral minority but because we engage in a perfectly natural form of human sexuality that conflicts with the requirements of patriarchal society. What is involved is not so much the oppression of gay people as the attempted suppression of homosexual behavior. This is a rather important distinction.

Certainly an immediate aim of gay liberation is to obtain civil rights for the minority of human beings who are presently homosexually oriented. This means fighting for equal rights legislation and extension of civil rights provisions in housing, employment and public accommodation to all people regardless of sexual orientation; it means fighting to remove homosexual acts and, indeed, all noncoercive sexual acts, from the penal codes; it means fighting to end solicitation and cross-dressing laws, which are used to victimize gays when other laws have been repealed; it means fighting against legalized



of our gay brothers and sisters by heterosexual discrimination in the psychiatric profession; it means fighting discrimination against gays in prison and for the right to receive visitors for sexual purposes on an equal basis with straight prisoners, and without the degrading trapping of marriage; it means fighting to end harassment and entrapment of gays; it means demanding the right of gays in the armed forces and in private life; it means fighting against Mafia exploitation of the gay community; it means demanding that the news media show us as news fit to print; etc.

One of the immediate aims of gay liberation is to secure the democratic right of homosexually oriented persons to be gay without being killed, beaten, imprisoned or strangled. Certainly it involves a struggle to persuade the heterosexual majority to treat persons with a homosexual life style with tolerance. This alone will be a difficult struggle: A survey a couple of years ago showed that two out of three Americans look on gays with disgust, discomfort, and fear. To most Americans, homosexuality is more of a threat to society than abortion, adultery, or prostitution.

Our struggle is not one merely for tolerance but for full acceptance as human beings. We are not out to preserve the subculture of the gay world into which society forces us when it fails to turn us into heterosexuals. Our goal is not to preserve any "homosexual way of life." The very concept of "homosexuality" as a distinct variety of human being is a myth fostered by heterosexual society to buttress its rigid exclusive heterosexual norms. In reality, however, there are only people whose sexual drives naturally lead them to engage in various kinds of sexual acts, including homosexual acts.

Our struggle is ultimately for a society in which there will no longer be "homosexuals" and "heterosexuals" but simply human beings expressing their natural sexual inclinations. Our struggle is for a society that will ensure the free development and expression of sexuality. Our struggle is for a society that not only tolerates homosexuality but that provides for a positive institutional integration of homosexuality. Such a society will be a heterosexual society.

The fact that today, for the first time in history, large numbers of gays are throwing off the yoke of secrecy and struggling openly for their rights adds a heretofore unseen element to the struggle for social change. It is this element that the revolutionary party, having recognized it, must now champion and help integrate into the revolutionary struggle to overthrow capitalist society.

## CULTURAL ROOTS OF ANTIHOMOSEXUAL PREJUDICE

One of the essential functions of religion is to stamp out society's antisexual restrictions with divine authority and instill a sense of guilt in anyone who violates, or is tempted to violate, them. "Not much education is required—only a little intellectual courage—to recognize that the powers seeking to dominate do not bring colonialism, Christianity, clothing, and 'morality' out of the closet; they consider them but because they want to anchor the spirit of the coolie in the individual," noted Reich. Without any doubt, one of Christianity's greatest achievements along this line has been in the psychic mutilation

it has inflicted upon millions of gays. There is probably no other group in which the "spirit of the coolie" has been so thoroughly imbedded, and for so long. Nowhere has the antihomosexual phobia of class society attained a greater intensity than in the societies with a Judeo-Christian heritage.

### Judeo-Christian Heritage

The antigay phobia that permeates American society to one degree or another infects all societies with a Judeo-Christian heritage. It was this phobia of the ancient Hebrews and the early Christians, and not the more permissive attitude of Hellenic Greece, toward homosexuality that came to exert the predominating influence in the West.

While this antigay paranoia can be traced back to the ancient Hebrews, however, even they did not always hold homosexuality in such contempt. Wainwright Churchill, in his book *Homosexual Behavior Among Males*, points to the fact that "mouth-genital and homosexual activities played a part in the religious rituals of the ancient Hebrews, and homosexual as well as heterosexual prostitutes thrived in the very precincts of the temples."

For reasons that are not entirely clear, the development of a hostile attitude toward homosexuality among the Hebrews occurred around 700 B.C., following the Babylonian Captivity. The break with practices such as homosexuality that occurred at that time distinguished the Hebrews from neighbors like the Canaanites and the Chaldeans, with whom they had previously shared such practices.

It seems likely that in their struggle with neighboring tribes who used male cult prostitutes in religious rituals exalting sexuality as a creative force in nature, the Hebrews came to associate homosexuality with idolatry. The intensity of their antigay phobia (if not the phobia itself) could thus be traced to religious roots. This association has persisted under Christianity where the tendency to link homosexuality and heresy has frequently branched out to include treason as well.

Mosaic law included 36 crimes punishable by death. Of these, 18—or one half—were for the so-called "unnatural" acts: between a man and an animal, between a woman and an animal, and between two men. "If a man also lieth with mankind as he lieth with a woman," warns *Leviticus* 20:13, "both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death." The most severe method of execution—death by stoning—was prescribed for this innocent and loving act.

### Sodom and Gomorrah

One of the most tenacious legends to arise out of this hostility toward homosexuality is that of Sodom and Gomorrah. The sin of these cities was so loathsome to the Hebrew god that he sent two enticing angels down to test its residents to see if they had turned from their evil ways. They had not. Victims of this first recorded case of entrapment, they succumbed to temptation, and god mercilessly wiped out the cities with fire and brimstone.

The use of fire and brimstone would seem to suggest volcanic activity. But there are no volcanoes around the Dead Sea. Which suggests that the story was introduced from some other area and served as a mythological ex-



planation for the destruction of a city that had long since disappeared. The myth became a vehicle for the Hebrew religion.

And while it seems possible, if not likely, that the real sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was not homosexuality so much as their inhabitants violated a code of hospitality by forcing their desires upon unwilling guests, the important thing is that homosexuality came to be viewed by the Hebrews as the vice of depraved, alien cultures, whether Egyptian or Greek.

The Hebrew laws against homosexual acts occur in chapters associating homosexuality with other customs of neighboring cultures—called "the doings of the land of Egypt" and "the doings of the land of Canaan." Sodom thus became a symbol in the Hebrew tradition of the practices of these and other cultures god's chosen people viewed as alien and hostile. And the merciless retribution Jehovah rained down upon Sodom was used for more than 2,000 years to justify the most barbaric and sadistic tortures of gay people. In fact, it was used by several California state legislators last fall in order to justify their vote against a bill removing the criminality status for oral and anal sex acts. The bill lost.

#### *The Christian Emperors*

Before the advent of Christianity, the Roman state made no attempt to suppress homosexuality. Then, in 342 A. D., Constantius issued a decree making it a capital crime—or, as he called it, "exquisite punishment." The earliest Christian emperors punished homosexual intercourse by decapitation. "When Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire," wrote E. Westermarck in his book *Christianity and Morals*, "a veritable crusade was opened against it."

Valentinian went further and decreed in 390 A. D. that those found guilty of the "shameful custom" of sodomy should be publicly burned alive—recalling the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah.

It was the superstitious and fanatic Justinian, however, who, in two edicts in 538 and 544, A. D., codified and set the pattern for subsequent laws against sodomy. The provisions of this code prevailed from the time of his reign until the adoption of the Napoleonic Code in 1810.

Justinian believed that homosexuality was the cause of the earthquakes, floods, and the epidemic of the plague that threatened his and his predecessor's reigns. It is to him that we can trace the notion that homosexuality endangers the security of the state, a notion that persists to this very day and which was widely invoked against gay people during the witch-hunt of the 1950s in the United States.

The penalty this Christian lawgiver prescribed for those who had "gone to decay through that abominable and impious conduct deservedly hated by God" was a painful death preceded by mutilation and castration. Justinian's psychopathic wife, Empress Theodora, was erotically aroused by torture and is said to have been driven to masturbation while witnessing castrations. Gibbon, in his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, describes one of these tortures as "the insertion of sharp reeds into the pores and tubes of most exquisite sensibility."

#### *Teachings of the Church*

The Christian church used two main arguments against

homosexuality: that it was specially condemned by God in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, and that homosexual acts were, in and of themselves, "unnatural." Variations on these two arguments are found in the pronouncements of many of the church Fathers and have found their way into the wording of nearly all the laws against gay sex in the United States today.

St. Augustine considered sodomy a bodily defilement and said that "those shameful acts, such as were committed in Sodom, ought everywhere and always to be detested and punished."

Clement of Alexandria saw in the belief of the ancients that a rabbit gets an additional anus each year clear proof of the lustful propensities of this animal. He went so far as to claim that it was for this very reason that Moses forbade the eating of rabbits, declaring them unclean, and that in so doing, Moses was implicitly condemning all "unnatural" modes of coitus, especially pediculation.

It was Thomas Aquinas who provided what came to be considered by subsequent moral theologians as "proof" that homosexual acts were against the law of nature. He argued that because the goal of the "sin against nature" was pleasure, not procreation, it therefore "offended against reason, is a species of lust." He considered both sodomy and masturbation to be more serious sins than any other sin of lust, including those, like rape, that cause harm to another person!

#### *The Middle Ages*

The most important medieval enactments against homosexual acts were four canons adopted by the Council of Nablouse in 1120. Of the 25 canons it adopted, most were directed at the "sins of the flesh." Burning was prescribed as the punishment by this council.

Havelock Ellis, in his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, claims that "in France in the thirteenth century the Church was so impressed by the prevalence of homosexuality that it reasserted the death penalty for sodomy at the Councils of Paris (1212) and Rouen (1214)."

Throughout the Middle Ages, homosexuality was associated with heresy. "Heretics were as a matter of course accused of unnatural vice," states Westermarck in *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*. Though there are no exact figures available, it seems likely that thousands upon thousands of gay people were burned at the stake, usually for witchcraft or heresy. This practice of burning homosexuals at the stake actually continued into the eighteenth century, the "Age of Enlightenment." Even the Renaissance, with its undertone of homosexuality, did not encourage any voices to be raised in protest of trials and death sentences for homosexuals; accusations were vehemently denied.

Some apologists for Christianity, like Derrick Sherwin Bailey in his biased but informative *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, attempt to play down the church's role in murdering gay people by arguing that it was the secular authorities, not the church, that had the power to burn people at the stake, and that homosexuals were only put to death if their "immorality in conduct was accompanied by grave error in belief" or if their behavior was "attributable to heretical ideas." But in a society completely dominated by the church, the line between ecclesiastical and secular authority was a



one indeed. Moreover, Bailey neglects to say what, anything, prevented the charge of homosexuality from being escalated to include "grave error in belief" or "heretical ideas." He even goes so far as to praise the church as generous in considering the homosexual not merely a criminal, but a sinner as well, which meant that repentance was possible! Yet what if the gay sinner was unrepentant? Would not this constitute a "grave error in belief"? Bailey's silence on this speaks volumes about the suffering of gay people during the Middle Ages.

### Homosexuality and Heresy

Bailey himself discusses at some length one of the most dramatic, and shameful, examples of the tendency of the medieval church to equate heresy and homosexuality: the crusade against the Albigensian heretics in the thirteenth century. Just how widespread homosexuality was among them seems difficult to establish, although Bailey believes it was widespread, and quotes J. C. S. Runciman (*The Medieval Manichee*) as saying that the Albigensians had "an easygoing attitude about sexual morals, an attitude peculiarly agreeable to the people of southern France." Whatever the case, it is significant that the charge of homosexuality, whether real or fabricated, was invoked as justification for massacring the Albigensians.

During the Middle Ages," says Bailey in a most revealing passage, "many heretics (and among them the most notable and dangerous were dualists [who, like the Albigensians, believed that matter is evil—D. T.], and propagated teaching about marriage and coitus which was repugnant not only to Christian doctrine but also to human reason and sentiment. Their theories found expression not only in wild and defiant assertions calculated to subvert morality, but occasionally also in pro-

miscuous orgies, while some construed them as justifications for homosexual practices."

The association of homosexuality and heresy was explicitly made linguistically. For the Albigensian heresy was an outgrowth of a Manichean heresy originating with the Bulgars. In French, they were called "bougres," and the word "bougrerie" came to refer both to the heresy of the Albigensians and the sin of sodomy. This is also the source of the English word "buggery" (a vulgarization of "bougrerie"), which acquired the additional meaning of intercourse with animals.

The Judeo-Christian tradition condemning homosexual love as not only sin against the law of god but a violation of the laws of nature was fully developed by the end of the thirteenth century. It was to remain dominant throughout Europe for 500 years, and it is still powerful today in the Anglo-Saxon countries, especially in the United States, where it holds sway in both the law and in popular attitudes (though, as Kinsey has shown, popular attitudes are generally ahead of the law on this question).

The fact that the phobia against homosexuality, weighed down as it is with superstition and ignorance, persists today, is a source of great anguish for gay people. It is a phobia, however, that is deeply rooted in the needs of capitalist class society. Obviously reason alone will not suffice to eliminate it. Nor will it suffice to bring about a reform of the antigay laws and other blatant forms of antigay oppression takes—however important and necessary the struggle against the forms of oppression is.

The eradication of antigay phobia and the gay oppression it helps to reinforce and perpetuate can only be accomplished by the revolutionary transformation of the society that breeds them.

June 18, 1972



A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCUSSION  
ON GAY LIBERATION

(Vol. 30, No. 4)

by Nat Weinstein, San Francisco Branch

As of this writing there has yet to be a systematic presentation of theoretical arguments supporting the proposition that gay liberation represents a factor with significant potential in the American revolution. There have been, however, quite a few articles in internal bulletins and in our press commenting positively along these lines. There are also the public statements of party spokespersons that help reveal what some of the arguments are. Finally, there is Comrade Sheppard's contribution which in its own way presents some of the issues on which lines of thought are drawn.

This hodge-podge, unfortunately, must substitute for a positive presentation of a thesis which is logically and by past practice the only proper way to begin a discussion.

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Comrade Barry Sheppard, in his article opening up the literary discussion of the gay liberation movement, makes a number of very important and correct observations of the nature of gay oppression. But his general analysis of the nature and meaning of the oppression of gay people is faulty in places and doesn't go far enough. It ends, among other things, at the point it really should begin. And the conclusions contained in his opinions of what the party's orientation should be is, I believe, in error.

Specifically, while correctly noting that unlike workers, oppressed national minorities and women, gay people play no special subordinate social role, he concludes merely that "There is not a precise analogy, therefore, between the oppression of gays and the oppression of workers, oppressed nationalities or women." There is more involved than mere imprecision in an analogy, in this fundamental difference in the social and economic position of gays.

I will try to prove in the following pages that because of the fact that gays play no special subordinate social role, and all it implies, (a) it can be readily shown that: they are not *exploited* because they are gay, (b) the great majority of gays escape overt oppression—and there is no reasonable basis to expect that that will change, (c) there are no effective social bonds linking gays together, (d) there are no effective links with the exploited and oppressed layers of society, and (e) while this issue comes under the general heading of the struggle for democracy, like many another struggle for democratic demands but unlike the struggle against the war, for example, it is extremely limited in potential for attracting large masses toward relating to this struggle. And, finally, I hope to prove, these reasons explain why gay liberation cannot play any significant role in the American revolution.

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It goes without saying that all analogies are imperfect; otherwise they wouldn't be analogies, rather the things

being compared would be the same. So it is, that analogies between workers and oppressed nationalities and women are "imprecise." After all, the use of the analogy as a tool is helpful only if the common identities possessed by the components of the analogy are germane to the point being made. The only point, it would seem, of an analogy between gay oppression and the oppression of workers, oppressed nationalities or women, is to say that gay liberation is as fruitful an area of work with as revolutionary a potential as the others—gay or take a little. That analogy, we shall see, falls flat on its face!

Now, we must keep in mind that this literary discussion takes place in the context of an atmosphere of confusion in much of the ranks of the party in which the false analogy has played no little part. While it is understandable that revolutionary-minded gays seek so far as possible to identify and equate their social condition with other oppressed sectors of society, it seems that many of the exaggerated and untrue assertions made to support this equation have taken considerable hold in the ranks of the party.

Looking back, we remember that in the first stage of the party's intervention into the gay liberation movements, it was widely accepted in the ranks of the party that gay liberation was destined to play as great or nearly as great a role in the revolution as we expect of oppressed nationalities and women. A "precise" analogy was seen between the forces. When this position became untenable as a result of greater experience with the development of gay liberation, the analogy was modified by dropping from the components a quality not affecting gay people but common to the others; *exploitation*. "Oppression" was substituted in its stead to serve as the key common denominator.

Even this proved untenable. How could you seriously equate the quality and extent of the oppression of the three with the one? Gay historians had to reach back into the dark pages of the Inquisition to find a modicum of support for this thesis. A new category was found readymade, circulating as a popular phrase in the new feminist movement; "psychological oppression."

"Psychological oppression" is an abstraction from both the concepts of exploitation and its derivative, oppression; having little connection with the meaning of oppression as it affects the three basic sectors of society we are considering. It is an abstraction, to say the least, whose size, weight, intensity, etc. resists objective measurement. Nevertheless, the "glue" that now holds the analogy together is provided by the concept "psychological oppression." But to prove what? After all, with the affliction of "psychological oppression" as our common denominator, all manners of people could be "proven" to be the source of revolutionary contingents.

The question at issue is not the reality of this category be it as it may. Gays are victims of a kind of overt oppression and the resultant reflection on their personalities



which is no less real. Of course, we should continue our position of unconditional support to the struggles of homosexuals for full democratic rights, including full civil and human rights, and against all the forms of discrimination and oppression they suffer under capitalism. What is at issue, however, is the concept of "psychological oppression" existing as a force capable of impelling significant numbers of gay people who are "in the closet" into "coming out." The "closet" avenue of escape from overt oppression, on the basis of historical experience, is too easy. The overwhelmingly large majority of "closeted" gays (according to repeated assertions by gays) evidently find "psychological oppression" more bearable than the overt form. There is no escape for workers as a class, oppressed peoples as nationalities or women as a sex. There is no "closet" except for the occasional light-skinned Black Chicano who can "pass," or the worker who rises above his class, or women whose economic position is powerful enough for them to place their privileges above their sex.

I will not insult the intelligence of the comrades by illustrating the chasm that separates the exploitation, the basis of the oppression and its psychological reflection suffered by workers, oppressed nationalities and women from that experienced by gay people. This absence of daily grinding exploitation and overt physical oppression in gay people's lives in contrast to the lives of Blacks, Browns, women and workers, however, should be kept in mind when estimating (particularly when the analogy employed as a tool) the possibilities and limits of gay liberation to play a role in the revolutionary process.

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Let me introduce a factor I think of key importance in the analysis of the potential of gay liberation.

Our politics begin with the fundamental premise that the workers are the class destined by history to lead the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a new society. Our fundamental task is to build the instrument that is capable of leading the class toward the accomplishment of this historic mission. We have no illusions concerning the capacity of the workers to achieve this goal without the revolutionary party leading the class. We try to understand their weaknesses as well as their strengths, limits and possibilities. And also try to understand the mechanism that minimizes their weaknesses, augments their strengths, extends their limits and possibilities so as to eventually realize the full revolutionary potential of our class. For example, workers are generally the victims of the worst prejudices perpetuated by the capitalist rulers and their agencies. We don't compromise with these prejudices. But we know that contrary to appearances, which cause others to see the worker as the hardest chauvinist nut to crack, there is an overriding factor operating that will enable us to overcome these prejudices. The working class has the capacity, in fact, of ridding itself more radically, more completely, more abruptly of these prejudices than any other section of society. At least in action—where it counts most.

That overriding factor is, of course, class interest. A clear example of this capacity of workers to about-face in their attitude toward Blacks is shown by the history of the rise of the C. I. O. Before the C. I. O., because of the racist attitudes and restrictions against Blacks, strikes were broken and lost. Particularly the attempts to or-

ganize the mighty industrial giants of American industry. The class interest of workers forced them to break with their racist path—virtually overnight—remove the barriers to the unions from the path of Black workers, and even for a time, becoming the boldest champions of the equality of the working class.

Certain prejudices held by workers are so crucially opposed to their economic, social and political interests, that not only are they at a disadvantage in the day-to-day struggles with the class enemy, but it would doom them to defeat in the long run. The superexploitation and oppression of nationalities and women—the lower wage levels, the great predominance in the capitalists' pool of unemployed workers—lowers all workers' living standards and serves as both a source of super profits and as a deadly weapon in the hands of the capitalist class.

This superexploitation of oppressed nationalities and women which flows from the special subordinate roles they play, is a quality it has been noted before, not present in the lives of gays. Neither are gays, as gays, involved in any way in this vicious and intricate process of exploitation and oppression which I have briefly sketched. For while it may be true that many gays are also workers, they are not doubly exploited and oppressed because they are gay, as for example are oppressed nationalities and women because of their nationality or sex or both. And therefore, unless these workers are *known* homosexuals, which is rare, their homosexuality is effectively irrelevant.

The exploitation and oppression of Blacks, Browns and women is in great part intimately related to the exploitation and oppression of the workers. They are tied together with a thousand strings. Some of the identity of interest can be seen by the three sectors, some cannot. Some common or compatible interests are mistakenly seen as antagonistic. Our task is to explain to each sector why each other's aims that might appear to be separate or antagonistic to the other's interests, aren't at all, and actually are in fact quite in the mutual interest. As for example; the hostility of workers to the Black and Chicano struggle for self-determination, one small facet of which is control over education in their own communities—the struggle for an equal education. After making clear whose side we are on in the racist dominated furor surrounding this question, we must explain to the workers how and why it is *directly in their class interest* to support this struggle. Since concrete gains won by Blacks and Chicanos spill over and result in gains for workers too. Circumstances are often similar, workers need better education too! Besides, there is the political example set for the workers by the independent struggle of Blacks and Chicanos itself. What is highly relevant to our discussion is the simple fact that this intimate relationship serves to make our efforts in the one compliment and augment our efforts in the other. I think it important to note here that Trotsky taught us that the national struggle is an organic part of the class struggle.

Isn't it apparent that there is no such relationship between gay liberation and the other three basic sectors? Is the prejudice held by workers against gays a factor in the workers struggle? What strings connect gays with the working class or the oppressed nationalities? How would our efforts among gays augment and compliment our efforts among workers, Blacks and Browns? You would have to stretch logic tortuously to try to make such a



case. On the contrary, a much better case can be made for the argument that the disproportionate emphasis on gay liberation based on the false notion that this issue is in some way decisive to the success of the revolution—or even an important contributor—will prove to be a diversion in our approach to oppressed nationalities, workers and women. Undue emphasis on minor issues can give an organization like ours an exotic image, erecting barriers that cannot be justified by subsequent historical development.

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Is there, however, such a link with the women's movement? Perhaps sexual freedom is the common aspiration that serves as the link? That would mean then, that the issue of sexual freedom would have to be stressed by us in the women's movement as it must of necessity be stressed in the gay liberation movement. In my opinion, that issue stressed by us in the women's movement would seriously hamper our efforts to build a mass movement of women, and isolate ourselves by alienating many healthy women who are not yet prepared to fight around the issue of winning sexual freedom.

Sexual freedom, the right of individuals to determine their own sex lives unhampered and without interference from the state and society, is unchallengeable. But this right varies in importance depending on class position. A woman who hasn't enough to eat for herself and her children, or has difficulty affording contraceptives or abortions, or can't get a job with a living wage, or doesn't have the *time* or *energy* to expend in the pursuit of a full and free sex life as a consequence of the struggle for survival, is less concerned and agitated by the restrictions imposed on sex by the state and society than those more favorably positioned in the social and economic order. It seems, on the contrary, that most women are repelled by what must appear to them to be an inexplicable *preoccupation* with sexual gratification. Experience, on the face of it I would think, amply confirms this judgment.

Is it possible the growth of gay liberation will gradually cause a decline in prejudices against homosexuality with more and more practicing this way of life, thus undermining the bourgeois family, as some would have us believe? The modern term encompassing this old idealist concept is building a "counterculture." Is it necessary to remind some comrades that the family grows out of and receives continual nourishment from the still too low level of the productive forces (productive forces which are held back today only by capitalism) and the systems of production based on private property? And that this class institution will remain for a time even after the socialist revolution, even under the most favorable conditions? The bourgeois family cannot be abolished or educated out of existence. It, like money, will wither and disappear when it is no longer necessary.

Or can it be that because the abridged rights of gays are part of the democratic struggle we have at last found the link to the exploited and oppressed layers and established the premise for the thesis that gay liberation is a revolutionary force with some potential? At the risk of stretching an analogy, may I suggest that on that plane of equation we can put as peers, not only gays and op-

pressed nationalities but also many repressed religious sects, pacifists, atheists, proponents of defense of the right to bear arms and drug culture cults.

Can we for a moment believe that because the struggle of an oppressed nationality for self-determination and the struggle of gay people to determine their sex lives are both democratic struggles, they are the same? Can they even be considered in the same league when you compare the size, weight, force, history, tradition, international connection, class connection, etc. of the two? But more important, again, without the same aggravating and compelling and infuriating social forces operating on them. Answering in the affirmative would reduce the permanent revolution to an absurdity.

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There are no driving forces that can impel in a mass effort a significant portion of the claimed tens of millions of gays out of the "closet" and into their full struggle for their rights. Never before have such formations driven only by essentially psychological factors played any significant role in history. What basis then, would we have for intervening in gay liberation given the absence of such driving forces? None have yet been presented. (I will not bother to answer those motivated by moral considerations, i.e., "oppression" is bad, period, and we have to do whatever is necessary to combat it.)

There is another kind of argument pro-gay interventionist comrades have alluded to in support of the position. It only seems to be independent of the half-perceived question of exploitation-oppression. Reference is made to the party's major stress on the anti-war movement as evidence that it is justifiable to take a "simple democratic demand—the right of the people to decide the question of war or peace—and make a major campaign of it for a prolonged period, putting virtually all our organizational resources at the disposal of this effort when necessary. This reference is calculated to prove that since both are democratic issues and both can be related to by wide layers of the population, therefore, it follows the potential for mass support for gay liberation is demonstrated. Again we find comrades so eager to justify a position they forget to think. A little thought, after all, will reveal that the formal equality of the two is not at all equal in life. Again no thought is given to measure—it takes but a glance—the forces operating on the population flowing out of the two democratic issues. The war issue involves the life and death of imperialism and the grim determination to halt the spread of the freedom struggle of the exploited and oppressed colonial people. It concerns the very future and continued existence of *all humanity*. It involves the attack on the living standard of working people to pay for the enormous costs of the anti-human, intrinsically capitalist policy. Does more really have to be said?

We now come to an entirely different sort of argument. That if we intervene in the gay liberation organization we can recruit (presumably) significant numbers of gays. And of course by intervention is meant to send comrades into the gay organizations, take leadership responsibilities and to help build new groups.

To intervene then, our party would of necessity have to project a line of propaganda and organize action



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short then: to intervene, given our approach to poli-  
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ment potential (or rather the presumption of such poten-  
tial) as *proof* of the thesis that gay liberation is a pro-  
found revolutionary force, or I am afraid, we are being  
asked to intervene "because we can recruit" *despite* the  
knowledge that gay liberation has no revolutionary role  
to play. Rather than a step toward the strengthening  
of the party, it is a dangerous step on the disastrous road  
followed by every tendency that thought it had found a  
new shortcut to rapid growth.

\* \* \*

No matter what the outcome of the current discussion,  
I'm convinced events will quite speedily bring reality home.  
But unfortunately not without leaving even more disap-  
pointed and embittered comrades than if we collectively  
rubbed our eyes now, took a real good clear look, and  
cleanly put an end to this chapter of the party's develop-  
ment.

More important, by drawing all the correct lessons from  
this whole chapter we can give a new dimension to the  
understanding of the younger comrades in what a class  
approach to politics is all about.

July 9, 1972



*Sexuality and Homosexuality: A New View* by Arno Karlen. W.W. Norton & Co. New York, 1971. 666 pages. \$15.

"Of the two hundred million people in the United States, some ten million are or will become exclusive or predominant homosexuals—more than there are Jews or Latin Americans," states author Karlen. "People with at least a few years' significant homosexual experience may number more than twenty-five million—more than blacks. Yet there is no 'problem' minority of which sociology has learned so little."

One of the reasons so little is known about <sup>who</sup> homosexuals are and how they live and what they have contributed to human history is that homosexual behavior has not generally been considered a worthy subject for investigation. Even in the recent past, for example, when Kinsey's Institute for Sex Research decided to undertake a study of homosexuality (still to be published), it was turned down by two dozen foundations. Even where homosexuality has been the object of scientific investigation, the investigators have rarely been able to divest themselves of their proheterosexual bias. And Western scientists studying homosexuality in other, more primitive, cultures, Karlen points out, have done so through glasses fogged by the Judeo-Christian tradition to which they belong.

As a result, no work trying to make sense out of what is known and claimed about homosexuality from history, literature, and science has ever been done.

This book claims to do so. In the first sentence, Karlen calls it "an act of presumption." And indeed it is. For after dispensing with modesty in the first sentence, he dashes into the hazardous and foggy fray of his subject with his sword flailing, and in the process cuts down homosexuality more than he does myths about it. His "new view" is not so much new as it is a more sophisticated presentation of the old tendency to deprecate homosexuality. If, in the process, some light is shed on homosexual behavior throughout history and throughout the world, it is in spite of Karlen's heterosexual bias, which keeps getting in his way.

Bias is not his only shortcoming. He is also a vulgar empiricist. Thus, for instance, in his first chapter he dismisses the theory that early matriarchal societies were replaced by patriarchal societies with a mere flick of the hand: Life is too "confusing, disorderly and exciting" for the theory of the matriarchy put forward by Bachofen, Engels and Briffault to be of any use, concludes Karlen, who remains undisturbed by his own inability to offer an alternative explanation.

But theory admittedly may not be the empiricist's strong point. Surely Karlen could be expected to fare better on the more solid ground of facts. Alas, here too his bias distorts the picture.

This is most crude in his chapter on homosexuality

in ancient Greece. Karlen's thesis is that "in ancient Greece homosexuality was considered a deviation; it was given positive value only by a minority of homosexuals, homosexuals and apologists. Neither did its presence in Greece have any relationship to social, artistic or political health. This is a novel thesis because it flies in the face not only of claims by authorities on the subject (such as Hans Licht, whose *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece* Karlen himself describes in his exhaustive, annotated bibliography as "the most complete scholarly compendium on the subject," but then dismisses as "unfortunately, written with a pervasive prohomosexual bias"), but even some of the facts Karlen himself presents. Most astonishing, however, is the fact that Karlen states his thesis without ever seriously attempting to prove it.

The entire chapter reveals poor judgment—despite the occasional positive observation, such as his rejection of the notion that there is a causal relationship between homosexuality and the downgrading of women ("homosexuality flourished more in the ancient world as woman's position improved and her freedom increased"). Item: "Probably the best source of ancient Greek attitudes toward homosexuality is Aristophanes." Actually, a writer of satirical comedies can hardly be considered the "best source" in an objective search for attitudes. Moreover, not only was Aristophanes the only poet to constantly ridicule pederasty, but he was writing in Athenian society (which had not institutionalized homosexuality to the extent that the Dorian society of Sparta had) at a time when public life was dominated by sophists, gossips, and libertines. But Karlen does not want nuances and historical complexities to slow his rush toward unsubstantiated, sweeping generalizations.

His conclusion about the poet Sappho is simply ridiculous. He correctly points out that only about 5 percent of her writing remains, thanks to the book-burning crusades of Christian zealots (around 380 A.D. the Bishop of Constantinople ordered her books burned "wherever they were found," and Pope Gregory VII had many of the remaining works burned in 1072). Yet while much of what remains is homosexual in content, it contains no explicit descriptions of the homosexual sex act. And so Karlen concludes: "That she was a practicing homosexual is quite likely, but not certain." In other words, since Sappho wrote merely good poetry, and not explicit pornography, there is reason to doubt she was gay! All this would no doubt be funny if it weren't typical of Karlen's reluctance to grant anything positive about homosexuals and their history.

At the end of several chapters in this book are interviews with homosexuals and scientists from various disciplines. These interviews are generally far more interesting than what Karlen has to say. They are intended, he explains, to "illuminate what may otherwise seem like fanciful theories or speculations." And sometimes they do, as for instance those accompanying his informative chapters



transvestism and transexuality, the relationship between hormones, genes, instinctual programming and imprinting, environment and sexual behavior.

The interview following the chapter on Greece, however, is an example of Karlen's reprehensible journalistic dialogue approach. To apparently "illuminate" his unsubstantiated theory about ancient Greece, he interviews an atypical male homosexual couple in present-day Chicago (that's Chicago, USA—not Chicago, Greece)! However interesting their remarks may be, they shed little light on the love of Sappho for Cleis, Socrates for Alcibiades, or Achilles for Patroclus.

The pervading assumption running through *Sexuality and Homosexuality* is that the least reliable source of information on homosexuality is the homosexual or "pro-homosexual" person. To have an objective opinion about homosexuality, you have to be heterosexual. This line of thinking no longer holds water where Blacks and women are concerned, but it is still the rule regarding homosexuals. This book is a contemptible effort to shore up such thinking.

\* \* \*

The preceding review was submitted to *The Militant* in February. It was considered for publication during the Gay Pride Week issue at the end of June and rejected. *Sexuality and Homosexuality*—whose dust jacket describes it as "the definitive explanation of human sexuality, normal and abnormal"—is a very lengthy, detailed, and on the surface learned treatment of a subject that is of interest both to the gay liberation movement and to the homosexual ideologues of capitalist society. The thrust of the book is to reinforce the efforts of the latter at the expense of the former. This no doubt would help explain the rave review it received from the *New York Times's* Christopher Lehmann-Haupt in October of last year, a month after it came out. It might also have more than an incidental relation to the fact that it has quickly qualified for the promotional efforts of the Book-of-the-Month Club. Author Karlen has become another "authority" on homosexuality and now graces platforms on the speakers' circuit.

The book has also been reviewed in the gay press, and found—in spite of its high price—to join the list of books with which a certain familiarity can be assumed among gay activists.

The decision of *The Militant* not to run the review puzzled me because I felt it met standards of length, quality, relevance, and timeliness; these standards were not unfamiliar to me since I had helped edit the "In Review" page for more than a year.

The reasons the review was rejected, I was told, were essentially two: It was "too erudite," and it "went beyond" where the SWP is at in terms of how it can or ought to relate to gay liberation. It was suggested that the review might more appropriately be submitted to a gay publication.

I disagree with both of these reasons. If I thought nothing more than a personal disagreement was involved, of course, I would not raise it in the framework of a political discussion. But more than that appears to be involved. The incident raises certain questions about the relationship between our press and the gay liberation

struggle that I would like to see cleared up by this discussion. It is in a spirit of candor and out of a genuine desire to clarify this that I have submitted this item.

The objection that the review is "too erudite" is doubtless the lesser—though at the same time the more concrete—of the two arguments. It appeared to be prompted essentially by two brief references with which persons who had not read the book might be unfamiliar—pederasty and Aristophanes. On pederasty: I see no reason why readers who do not know what pederasty is (for the most part, these would probably be straight readers) should object to looking the word up in a dictionary. This is preferable, in my opinion, to, say, adding a parenthetical explanation about this practice that played such an important role in the sexual life of ancient Greece; such an explanation would be absurd and condescending in the context of such a review. To suggest that a reference to pederasty might perhaps be out of place in a discussion of ancient Greece in a review of a book on homosexuality would seem to me to imply one of two beliefs: either that straight readers would take offense at the assumption that they should know something about a practice they may go through life neither doing nor knowing anyone who did; or that such a reference is irrelevant and somehow out of place in a socialist paper—specifically sexual references belonging more properly in the gay press. I don't think either one of these arguments would be warranted.

The reference to Aristophanes, while it assumes a certain level of culture perhaps, does not necessitate any knowledge of his work for the reader to get the point. He is identified as a satirist and the point is made that whatever other things one may learn from a satirist, an objective appreciation of the mores of a particular epoch is not necessarily one of them. I think most readers would understand this.

*Sexuality and Homosexuality*, while its approach is essentially a journalistic and popularizing one, nevertheless contains a great deal of "learned" information on a subject pervaded more with ignorance than intelligence or understanding. The fact that this is presented with a definite antihomosexual bias and a considerable dose of dishonesty will be welcomed by those who subscribe to the prevailing notions of the inferiority of homosexuality; it will go unnoticed by readers unfamiliar with any of the intelligent literature on the subject.

To expose this book properly and the way it deserves to be exposed would require more space than *The Militant* is at this time prepared to grant. It was in an effort to cope with this limitation that I decided that rather than superficially skip through 666 pages, it would be more meaningful to readers who had not read the book if I were concrete and dealt at some length with one typical and significant chapter. Even in view of the space limitations, I believe that this approach provides the reader with an honest idea of the kind of proheterosexual prejudice that this society requires and acclaims in its "authorities" on homosexuality.

The argument that the review somehow "went beyond" what can properly be said on the subject of gay liberation in the pages of *The Militant* (even in a review, which, it might be added, is not a "line" article) is an argument of a more serious nature, in my opinion. It was, unfortunately, an argument advanced more, it seems, on the



basis of a general "feeling" than on well thought-out criteria. I think that, where possible, clear-cut guidelines should be laid down, and if indeed such guidelines already exist, I think they should be stated candidly. The problem, in other words, is, just what is the line beyond which articles and reviews in our press cannot go? Indeed, just where is the SWP "at" in terms of relating to gay liberation through its press? Frankly, I now find myself somewhat uneasy in attempting to answer these questions because of the prevailing ambiguities, because of the apparent unanimity when it comes to deciding that a line has definitely been crossed, and the no less apparent lack of a clearly articulated definition of what that line is.

Perhaps some comrades feel that it is out of line for the SWP or its press to take a position, so to speak, on whether or not homosexuality is good. Perhaps they feel that this review "went beyond" where the SWP is at because it implicitly assumes that homosexuality is good; indeed, it does not pretend to stand aloof of this question but stands foursquare, without being obtrusive or browbeating, on the notion that gay is good. If comrades feel that where the SWP is at in its public position is a sort of neutral zone on the question of homosexuality—neither good nor bad, the product of causes so complex, and an issue perhaps so divisive, that it is undesirable to take a position on the normality of homosexual impulses—then it would be a positive contribution to this discussion for such a belief to be stated forthrightly. In my opinion, such a position would be both politically and scientifically unsound.

It would appear to me, in fact, that it is precisely this underlying assumption of the review that homosexuality is good, and the fact that it does not even occur to the reviewer to suspend judgment on the question, that the comrades regarded with some discomfort. This is certainly the impression that the somewhat vague notion

of "going beyond" conveys. If so, such an approach would reveal a rather serious misunderstanding of the proper relationship between the revolutionary party and the gay liberation struggle. In my opinion, it is unrealistic to think that the SWP can come to terms with gay liberation without a position recognizing that homosexuality is both normal and good. This does not mean advocating homosexuality. It does mean rejecting any of the sexist notions that homosexuality is a deviation, an abnormality, or a sickness. There are no doubt comrades who still believe that homosexuality is a sickness and something not quite normal. This would not be surprising since this is also the prevailing view of the sexist society in which we have all been brought up. But the existence of such notions cannot be allowed to obstruct the presentation of a proper, positive attitude toward homosexuality in our press.

This has already been done—in my article "Homosexuality: Fact versus Myth" in the July 2, 1971, issue of *The Militant*, for example, which advances, with appropriate scientific backing, the argument that homosexuality is a normal expression of human sexual capacities inherent in the human animal. While this article was no more a "line" article than the review of Karlen's book, it certainly suggested that the party took a forthright position behind the concept that gay is good. I am quite aware of the fact that some comrades found this notion—as well as the article—disturbing; they felt it "went beyond" where the SWP is "at." But does this mean that articles reflecting such an approach are now no longer considered appropriate for publication in our press? If so, our ability to discuss homosexuality and gay liberation in our press would be subjected to an incorrect, unscientific, and unjustifiable limitation.

Candid answers to these questions can, in my opinion, only serve to help clarify this discussion.

July 14, 1971



## BASIC QUESTIONS THAT MUST BE ANSWERED

[Vol. 30, No. 5]

by John Lauritsen, Upper West Side Branch,  
New York Local

### *Homosexual Behavior: Revolutionary Theory There Can Be No Revolutionary Movement*

any of the answers to certain basic questions are central to development, an answer to a theory of gay liberation. Such questions must be comradely raised—and answered scientifically—as: Is there a naturalness and superiority of heterosexual behavior over homosexual behavior? Will homosexual behavior increase or decrease in the sexual society?

But in addition, though more subjective, we must ask: Will homosexual love occupy an honored place in a free and forward human culture? Will homosexuality be considered a desirable characteristic for the sons and daughters of the socialist future?

### *Is gay good?*

Our answers to these questions will determine whether our involvement in gay liberation will merely consist of a small libertarian fight for the democratic rights of misanthropic or whether it will involve a more profound struggle for human reason, with revolutionary implications.

In my opinion we cannot expect to recruit gay activists who deserve the respect of gay comrades on a position of "liberation." Enough evidence is available for Marxists to draw conclusions on the above questions, and we must have the intellectual courage to do so.

\* \* \*

I feel Comrade Barry Sheppard is mistaken when he writes, "Leaving aside all discussion about why homosexual impulses exist, or why a section of the population prefers homosexuality, which need not concern us in trying to understand the nature of the oppression of gay people." (emphasis added)\*

I believe these and similar questions do concern us, and they concern us because, as Lenin put it, "... the role of a vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory." (*What Is To Be Done*—emphasis in original)

Also relevant is Lenin's conviction, expressed by quoting the "profoundly true and important words of Karl Kautsky": "Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge." (op. cit.—emphasis added)

There is less room for impressionism, "gut feelings," or any other type of subjectivism in the present discussion of gay liberation than in any which has taken place in the socialist movement—precisely because no other area of discussion is so laden with deep-seated fear and prejudice. The disgraceful exclusionary policy of the 1960s is witness to the latter.

### *Homosexual Acts Represent Natural, Completely Human Forms Of Behavior*

My own position can be stated succinctly. I feel that homosexual acts represent natural, completely human forms of behavior. I further believe that there is no natural superiority of heterosexual over homosexual behavior. Or phrased another way, the human animal is gay (of course I include the so-called "bi-sexuals" in the gay category, since the great majority of those who are homosexually oriented are also heterosexually oriented).

I presented evidence for these positions in my first bulletin. Other comrades have presented further evidence. I shall not repeat the arguments here.

### *If Comrades Feel Homosexuality Is Unnatural . . .*

Some comrades (and most Americans) would not agree with these positions. If anyone feels a quite different analysis of human sexuality is correct, I strongly urge him or her to write it down and submit it to this discussion. Open debate is the precondition for theoretical unity, and hence, for a strong intervention into the living class struggle.

I feel constrained to qualify this somewhat. Contributions should be serious, and a certain degree of knowledge is essential for a reasoned analysis of sexuality. The intelligent literature on sexuality is limited, and most sex literature is the foulest idealist garbage.

At a bare minimum, two books must be read in order to have any understanding of homosexuality. They are: *Homosexual Behavior Among Males* by Wainwright Churchill, and *Patterns of Sexual Behavior* by C. S. Ford and F. A. Beach. Both are available in paperback, and I see no reason why every branch bookstore should not carry them. I don't agree with everything in these two books, but I do feel that no intelligent discussion is possible without having studied them. Three or four evenings of reading is not too much to ask of those who would contribute to the discussion.

There is much other literature—some essential for a comprehensive analysis, most of it foolishness. I am confident that the theorists of the revolutionary party can deal with the ideas of such charlatans and nincompoops as the medical "authorities," Doctors Reuben, Bergler, Bieber, and Socarides, or such lay fools as Norman Mailer, Arno Karlen, or Joseph Epstein. A Marxist movement must be capable of rebutting bourgeois psychiatrists and moralists as well as bourgeois economists, sociologists, historians, etc. If we can't do this, then we have no business intervening in the gay liberation movement. Or any other movement. Indeed, we ought to dissolve.

### *A Special Plea To The Leadership*

It seems to me that a prerequisite for party democracy is knowing how our leaders stand on basic questions, knowing the reasons behind a course of action or non-action.

A certain holding-back with regard to involvement in gay liberation has been evident in the past year, partially owing, I believe, to the lack of a generally accepted Trotskyist analysis, the development of which is the purpose

\* I will grant, however, that Sheppard's brief and rather general contribution would have been much longer and more cumbersome if he had attempted to deal with every germane issue; and he may have intended to leave the development of these questions to the literary discussion itself, which would be entirely understandable.



In sum, we must be able to describe the role oppression of homosexuals plays in the class struggle. These are the subjects for subsequent analyses.

July 24, 1972

## A COMMENT ON COMRADE NAT WEINSTEIN'S CONTRIBUTION

by Lee Smith, Upper West Side Branch,  
New York Local

on the question.

### *A Basically Correct Approach*

"Our politics begin," Comrade Weinstein writes, "with the fundamental premise that the workers are the class destined by history to lead the mass to the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a new society. Our fundamental task is to build the instrument that is capable of leading the class toward its accomplishment of this historic mission." This is pretty basic. It ought to go without saying that the literary discussion, like all of our other activity, proceeds on this foundation. This discussion is aimed toward our taking a decision respecting the allocation of our resources and energies vis-a-vis the gay liberation movement.

Comrade Weinstein is at pains to show that the very nature of homosexual oppression precludes the development of a mass fight against it. I believe he errs in his analysis of gay oppression. But whatever errors he makes, Comrade Weinstein proceeds with a basically correct approach—keeping his eye on what potential the gay movement has to advance the class struggle and build the party.

Although he advocates continuing the party's present course with regard to the gay movement, however, Comrade Weinstein neglects to point out the positive effect this course has had in building the party. By taking a correct position in defense of homosexual rights and making that position clear in our press, speeches, and campaign leaflets, the party has not only won new respect from the more conscious vanguard where we recruit today but from much wider layers where we will recruit tomorrow. We adopted this position not in a context where it marks us as kooks and dangerously isolates us, but quite to the contrary at a time when it puts us right at the cutting edge of changing public opinion.

It would be a mistake for us to do more than we are already doing in the absence of any development toward a campaign or formation in which we could productively intervene. But we should be clear that we have benefited from what we have already done.

Comrade Weinstein says he is convinced "events will quite speedily bring reality home." In regard to our present position, I believe they already have.

July 28, 1972



HISTORY, DOCUMENTS AND ANALYSIS OF THE  
GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT AND PROPOSED  
OUTLINES FOR PARTY GAY WORK

(Vol. 30, No. 6)

by Michael Maggi, Los Angeles Branch

The rise of the gay liberation movement has been one of the more sudden, dramatic and unexpected of all the movements in the United States and around the world. Only a few years ago, almost everyone in the country, including many gay persons, believed gays were "sick," deformed by overbearing mothers, mindless exhibitionists and probably prone to criminal acts. Now hundreds of gay liberation groups exist in the cities, colleges and high school campuses of every state. Gays are organizing within all sectors of the population—as gay women in lesbian feminist organizations; as Blacks, Chicanos and Puerto Ricans in nationalist gay organizations; in professional groups, churches and unions. (This process is also beginning in other parts of the world, although at a slower pace than in the United States.)

#### *Gay Liberationist Consciousness*

The gay liberation movement is a product of the broader radicalization that is taking place today, but at the same time it is at the heart of this radicalization. The women's liberation movement, while also drawing strength from the motion of gay women, has had the greatest impact with its concepts of sisterhood, all-female organization, consciousness-raising activities and militant mass actions. All this helped to create a climate where gays who saw their heretofore secret "personal" problems transformed into political and social problems. These problems and the situation gays found themselves in was to be moved against by a movement of gays demanding an abolition to all forms of oppression and discrimination, rather than individual actions by each person to find a comfortable niche in the world through an accommodation within society's standards.

Gays are standing up proudly to demand an end to all the laws, customs and social institutions that oppress and exploit us. Toleration is a crumb dropped from the plate of the oppressor in the hopes of satisfying our hunger for liberation and derailing our movement. But liberation is our goal—from all forms of oppression and discrimination. There is nothing inherent in homosexuality that is sick, psychotic, decadent, unnatural, immoral, depraved, deformed, incomplete or funny. Homosexuality is the capacity to love a person of the same sex.

"Gay is Good" is a slogan reflecting the same pride, insolence, self-identity and group consciousness that "Sisterhood is Powerful" represents for the women's liberation movement or "Black is Beautiful" for the Black movement. This slogan and the gay movement are giant steps forward for the gay men and women who have been the most persecuted, divided and brainwashed oppressed group in history.

Gays have had their sexuality deformed, distorted and oppressed to the extent that many millions of gays never had fulfilling lives—with in terms of their relationships with people in general or their sexual lives. Cowed into submission by society's demands and standards, many of us find ourselves trapped into families and relationships

that attempt to transform us into different persons. In our own individual closets we were alienated from each other and ourselves. Growing up in heterosexual families and groomed for mother/wife and father/husband roles, we never had the opportunity to understand that there are millions and millions of us. We internalized our "personal failure" to live up to the standards of femininity and masculinity. We felt ashamed and fearful because we were not the "real" women and "real" men "made by God" and put here to form a "great nation."

Our isolation, fear and sense of shame forced us into closets as our sexuality was taking shape and even before we fully realized our sexual identity. Being in a closet means trying to think and act as our oppressor—the ideal of men and women. Forced secrecy is fundamental to the closet, but a gay person's oppression doesn't end there. The closet forces gays to accept personal conformity in clothing, politics, and morality. *A closet is our total forced social conformity.* Rejection of this and "coming out" is a first step of gays moving massively against all the institutions that oppress us.

For a gay person to "come out" it is not necessary to fulfill a checklist of activities such as informing one's parents, employer and every straight friend of one's sexual orientation. Coming out is a much more important fundamental overhaul of a gay's life. Rejecting the absolute secrecy of a gay's sexual orientation is important. But coming out is really the rejection of all the social norms forced upon us and our rejection of society's right to sit in judgment of what is "sick," "immoral" or "criminal" in the sexual lives of people who only wish to love each other. Coming out is asserting a person's humanity and dignity as a gay person. Coming out is taking to the streets to demand an end to our unjust oppression and the oppression of tens of millions of others like us.

Many gays may never come out (under capitalism), but the development of the gay liberation movement, and its further development into a massive movement, encourages gays to act in their own defense and for their own demands in other areas of life—as women, as students, as workers and as members of oppressed nationalities, etc.

#### *The Roots of the Gay Liberation Movement*

David Thorstad explains the modern origins of anti-gay laws in France and England in his contribution, "Antigay Laws in the United States and Some Other Countries." The revolutionary upheavals in France in the eighteenth century abolished the laws against gays through the omission of the "unnatural vice" laws from the legal codes. This action taken by the French Constituent Assembly in 1791 was a major step forward for the rights of gays. In 1861, England abolished the death penalty for gays only to enact further laws against homosexuality, "outrageous behaviour," "gross indecency" and "lewd conduct," etc.

It was apparently not until the 1890's that a movement developed of homosexuals and humanitarian straights



rejected the prevailing official morality.

In England, Edward Carpenter organized a committee to educate people on issues regarding gay sexuality and to propagandize against the antigay laws. One major issue in the public limelight at the time was the conviction and imprisonment of Oscar Wilde under one of the newly enacted laws. Carpenter held to the existing view among gays and straights, that homosexuals were an entirely separate category of human being—a third sex. Lacking any scientific studies of sexual behavior to base his theories on, this is understandable. (This view of gay sexuality is explained by Kurt Hiller, a proponent of that theory, in a speech to the Second International Conference for Sexual Reform in Copenhagen in 1928. His minority address, entitled "A 1928 Appeal for Homosexual Rights," was reprinted in the May, 1971, *International Socialist Review* and *Gay News*.)

Carpenter's activities were generally of a secretive nature as an attempt to educate and solicit compassion from liberal humanitarian members of Parliament.

In 1898, the noted sex scholar, Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, established the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in Germany to educate the public and organize for legal reform. Hirschfeld and this committee became internationally known. (The Bolsheviks were later to base their position on homosexuality partially on Hirschfeld's work.) He utilized his writings in the Soviet Encyclopedia. The encyclopedia was rewritten as the Stalinist bureaucracy moved to reenact laws against homosexuality and ended the Soviet government's tolerant and scientific approach to homosexuality.)

This tendency toward the formation of small semi-secret national and legal reform societies continued into the twentieth century. The International Committee on Sexuality brought gay and gay-rights groups into contact with each other and spread what little educational material there was to all parts of the world.

In 1936, a number of homosexuals from various countries formed a gay colony on Nawa Sangga island in the Gulf of Siam. This group went through various periods and different names including the Han Temple Organization (1940), the Movement for the Study of Homosexual Problems (1948, at which time the group moved to an Indonesian island), and finally the Homosexual World Organization (circa 1950). Around this time the group established a magazine with international circulation in an attempt to exchange scientific information on homosexuality and the status of efforts to reform the law. Several internationally famous persons were connected with this group, including Andre Gide. The Homosexual World Organization contacted Asian homosexual groups to publicize their existence and to demonstrate the naturalness of gay sexuality. Some of the Asian groups were hundreds of years old, including the Buddha-Shakti Sect of Siam, the High Rooms of Macao, the Moon Flower Rooms of China and the Sons of Mauna Loa of Hawaii. Around 1952 this organization vanished (there doesn't seem to be any information available as to the cause).

#### *The Development of the Gay Movement in the United States (1920-1950)*

I have little detailed information on the organizations of this period. However, they can be characterized as believing that homosexuals were a third sex, being secret

or semisecret organizations, and almost exclusively male. Some of these groups claimed memberships of several hundred, but all of them were short-lived. They were never able to develop stable leaderships and organizations. Some of these groups included the Society for Human Rights (Chicago, 1925), Sons of Hamidy (midwest and western states, 1934), Legion of the Damned (New York and Chicago, 1940s), Veterans Benevolent Association (1940s) and the Bachelors for Henry Wallace (national, 1948).

The crippling sectarian third-sex approach was always to pit a small section of gays against the much larger number of gays that were simply labeled "straight" by the unqualified nature of the either-or categories. (This is another verification of the necessity for correct theory.)

#### *The Development of the Gay Movement in the United States (1950-1969)*

The organizations that emerged in the early 1950s gave the gay movement its first national scope with permanent groups.

The Mattachine Society (first known as the Mattachine Foundation) was formed on July 7, 1950, in Los Angeles. Its first organizers came from the Bachelors for Wallace organization a couple of years before. The Mattachine Society had members of both sexes, but was predominantly male. In the mid-1960s, this group claimed a dues-paying membership of around 1500 nationally.

The Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) was formed in San Francisco in 1953. Of course, this group was entirely female. DOB claimed a membership of over 1000 nationally and may still be around the same size.

Both groups were organized after the publication of the Kinsey studies. These gave these new groups important scientific weapons with which to combat prejudice. The social upheavals around and after the war opened up the atmosphere slightly to the new things Kinsey, and more importantly, these new groups were saying.

The initial activities of these groups were to educate gays with the Kinsey findings, encourage self-confidence, fight limited battles for civil rights and to function as a social organization.

Both groups gave birth to national publications that advanced the dissemination of Kinsey's ideas and built the Mattachine Society and DOB.

One, Incorporated, was established by a split from Mattachine in 1952. One, Inc. in Los Angeles held weekly classes on sexuality and the legal situation and soon opened offices in Chicago, Detroit, New York City and Phoenix. This magazine carried on an extensive publishing schedule. Previous to *One Magazine*, no homosexual publication could be sent through the mails. It was only in 1958 that a federal court ruled that gay publications were protected by the first amendment.

In 1956, the DOB began publishing *The Ladder*. This is still the most widely read lesbian publication. Since the rise of the feminist movement, *The Ladder* has adopted a pro-women's liberation position which has related the DOB to both the gay and feminist movements.

The first demonstrations during the current radicalization demanding civil liberties for gays occurred in Philadelphia on July 4, 1964. This was a picket line around the Federal building of some 30-60 persons demanding an end to job discrimination, an end to the victimization of gays in the military and draft system, and the repeal



of all antigay sex laws such as the sodomy and solicitation laws. In later years, these demonstrations occurred in Washington, D. C., San Francisco, Chicago and other cities.

The North American Conference of Homophile Organizations (NACHO) is a national gay coalition formed in 1966. The Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis were the initial organizers of NACHO and remain its main pillars of support. This group holds yearly national conferences and occasionally regional gatherings. Its main purpose is to lobby in state legislatures for penal code reform of a liberal nature. This group has never called a demonstration.

NACHO has affiliated organizations in almost all major cities. These groups are usually Mattachine Societies or DOB chapters, although in some cities they may have other names such as the Society for Individual Rights in San Francisco or the Circle of Friends in Dallas.

NACHO's influence had never been great in the state capitols, but with the emergence of the gay liberation movement, their lobbying efforts have had minimum successes.

Episodic and semi-spontaneous demonstrations and law suits generally revolving around job discrimination and police harassment steadily increased over the years.

For example, in the spring of 1969 the California Committee for Homosexual Freedom was formed and conducted a public campaign to force the States Steamship Lines and Tower Records, both in San Francisco, to rehire employees fired for being gay. For several weeks picketing was conducted in both places with extensive coverage in the gay and straight press. The struggle failed in the States Steamship Lines case but was victorious in the Tower Records case.

These actions, along with all the other events in the United States and the world, advanced the consciousness of the gay community and set the stage for the explosion at Stonewall. More and more gay people were becoming inspired by the struggles of a few gays and the mass social struggles of the other oppressed.

#### *The Gay Movement from Stonewall to the Present (June 27, 1969—)*

The police attack upon gays in the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street in New York City on June 27, 1969, sparked the appearance of the gay liberation movement with its own particular attitudes toward actions, organization and demands that went well beyond the best efforts of the first gay organizations that developed in the early '50s and before.

In August, 1969, the NACHO conference met in Kansas City and was confronted by the NACHO Youth Committee which proposed a document entitled, "A Radical Manifesto—The Homophile Movement Must Be Radicalized!" Although this 12-point resolution lost on all votes to the conservatives, it marked the new mood among younger gays and the development of gay liberation. The document read:

"1) We see the persecution of homosexuality as part of the general attempt to oppress all minorities and keep them powerless. Our fate is linked with these minorities; if the detention camps are filled tomorrow with blacks, hippies, and other radicals, we will not escape that fate, all our attempts to dissociate ourselves from them not-

withstanding. A common struggle, however, will bring a common triumph.

"2) Therefore we declare our support as homosexual or bisexuals for the struggles of the black, the feminist, the Spanish-American, the Indian, the Hippie, the Young the Student and the other victims of oppression and prejudice [sic].

"3) We call upon these groups to lend us their support and encourage their presence with NACHO and the homophile movement at large.

"4) Our enemies, an implacable, repressive governmental system, much of organized religion, business and medicine, will not be moved by appeasement or appeals to reason and justice, but only by power and force.

"5) We regard established heterosexual standards of morality as immoral and refuse to condone them by demanding an equality which is merely the common yoke of sexual repression.

"6) We declare that homosexuals, as individuals and members of the greater community, must develop homosexual ethics and esthetics independent of, and without reference to, the mores imposed upon heterosexuality [sic].

"7) We demand the removal of all restriction on sex between consenting persons of any sex, of any orientation of any age, anywhere, whether for money or not, and for the removal of all censorship.

"8) We call upon the churches to sanction homosexual liaisons when called upon to do so by the parties concerned.

"9) We call upon the homophile movement to be more honestly concerned with youth rather than trying to promote a mythical, non-existent 'good public image.' [sic]

"10) The homophile movement must totally reject the insane war in Viet Nam and refuse to encourage complicity in the war and support of the war machine, which may well be turned against us. We oppose any attempt by the movement to obtain security clearances for homosexuals, since these contribute to the war machine.

"11) The homophile movement must engage in continuous political struggle on all fronts.

"12) We must open the eyes of homosexuals on the continent to the increasingly repressive nature of our society and to the realizations that Chicago may await tomorrow [sic]."

In the East Coast, especially New York City, Gay Liberation Fronts (GLFs) were beginning to organize on a new basis than the old-line homophile groups. At first GLFs took an interventionist attitude toward NACHO and its affiliate regional conferences. GLFs introduced resolutions to support antiwar activities, support women's liberation activities, and support campaigns in defense of Black Panthers victimized by the state. In main, these resolutions were too general and radical sounding to be endorsed by the more conservative organizations and coalitions. However, the following is a kind of resolution that was submitted to conferences and adopted, even though it was only the GLFs that became actively involved in actions called by other movement organizations.

The following is a resolution adopted by the Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations (ERCHO) meeting in Philadelphia on November 1-2, 1969:



will bring the Eastern Regional Conference of Homosexual Organizations considers these inalienable human rights above and beyond legislation:

- 1. Dominion over one's own body
- 2. Freedom through sexual freedom without regard to sexual orientation
- 3. Freedom through freedom to use birth control and abortion
- 4. Freedom through freedom to ingest the drugs of one's own choice
- 5. Freedom from society's attempts to define and limit human sexuality, which are inherently manifested in economic, educational, religious, social, personal and legal discrimination.
- 6. Freedom from social and political persecution of all minority groups:
- 7. Freedom from the institutionalized inequalities of the social structure and the judicial system
- 8. Freedom and the right of self-determination of all oppressed minority groups in our society

We specifically condemn the systematic and widespread persecution of certain elements of these minorities, including all political prisoners and those accused of crimes without victims (e.g., homosexuals)."

The militancy and independence shown in the NACHO South Committee resolution and the ERCHO resolution was developed to a much greater degree in the emerging Gay Liberation Fronts. Many of these groups split and became ultraleft, but it is important to consider their contributions to the gay liberation movement, as well as to deal on their shortcomings.

(Comrades should read Carl Whittman's "Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto." This is one of the first documents of the gay liberation movement. It will give comrades more of a feel for the new mood of the gay movement and a sense of its history.)

The most important contribution of the GLFs was to advance, in no uncertain terms, the necessity for direct action by gays in our own self-interest to combat our oppression. The GLFs engaged in marches, sit-ins, picket lines, and interventions into meetings called by professional, religious and political organizations. No one was too important or liberal to "embarrass" at public meetings by asking questions from the floor or pickets outside. No body of people was too sacrosanct to challenge their bigoted attitudes or complicity in the oppression of gays.

The GLFs had an aggressive attitude in spreading and helping to develop other GLFs in other cities and states. These groups, mainly campus-based, eventually sprung up on every major campus in every part of the country.

Besides actions, the GLFs' concentration on consciousness-raising groups drew thousands of people to GLFs over a period of time. This enabled the organizers of the gay movement to talk to their "independents" about gay pride and strategies for the gay movement. This was a major focus for all the GLF organizations.

The drawbacks in GLFs also sprung from the fact that it was a product of this radicalization. There were strong tendencies towards counterculturalism and anti-leadership that were to be the fatal errors in the GLF structure.

The "unstructured" nature of the organization led, as not only could, to an inability to maintain stable organizations and democratic leaderships. The real leadership therefore fell to various people who could not develop any real program for action by the gay movement or discuss

out perspectives for building a mass gay liberation movement. This was true no matter how sincere and capable these activists were in their own right. In this way, it was to be expected that the groups would develop multi-issue approaches to the radicalization as a whole and fall into the trap of ultraleftism.

First, on their incorrect approach to other movement organizations. The gay activists in the GLFs were never able to realize they could not build the GLFs into revolutionary socialist gay organizations—no matter how much they talked about the need for revolution and attempted to build a movement. GLFs began giving uncritical support to all the movement organizations, especially the Black Panthers. GLF began demonstrating with other women's organizations, student and Black organizations, to protest the war, women's oppression, racism, etc. In exchange for their support, they demanded and expected support in return. They had no concept of building broad civil liberties defense committees or broad action coalitions on a single or a few related demands. They approached other organizations and expected to work out complete programmatic agreements.

The GLFs developed the tactic of the "zap" to publicize their demands. These zaps tended to be semi-disruptive interventions by a few or a few score gays into the meetings of professional, religious and political groups. These zaps into meetings were a very positive initial development in demanding that gays be recognized as persons with something to say and grievances to be redressed. However, this perspective of zaps had a strong tendency to substitute a small number of gays as an activist "vanguard" while most gays would learn of the action from the media and be "inspired" to take some unspecified action themselves.

The program of the Gay Liberation Fronts—insofar as there was one—was a 20- or 25-point series of proposals, slogans and demands essentially demanding the total abolition of everything this country stands for (see appended statements by Houston GLF). This isn't a bad position to have in the abstract, but the demands included on an equal basis slogans such as "abolish the family" and "abolish the sodomy and solicitation laws." The first could only be gained by a complete transformation of society under socialism while the second is a revolutionary democratic demand capable of mobilizing masses of gays under capitalism against the government.

An added problem was its inability to involve lesbians in a meaningful way in the decision making of the organization and in all its activities. The problems of males and females in GLFs continually worsened until splits occurred in almost every organization with independent lesbian organizations developing. Most of these splits occurred in 1969-70.

In some cases these splits proved to be a big advance in organization as females came to lesbian feminist consciousness. However, often in this period, the women's groups simply adopted an all-female GLF approach, which could hardly solve any of the other fundamental problems.

All the centrifugal tendencies and conflicts developed to a head in the New York GLF in the fall of 1969. The New York Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) was formed when a dozen gays "shared their concern—even anger that the potentials for social and political change regarding the oppression of the homosexual community were not being



used most effectively. From common experiences in other organizations they all agreed that a structured, single issue approach would best accomplish their initial goal of law reform, to give the homosexual citizen the rights and freedoms granted to every citizen." ("What is GAA?" N.Y. GAA, June 27, 1971) By January 1970, GAA had a constitution, officers and a determination to reach out and involve masses of gay people.

While GAA used many of the tactics, including "zaps," that the GLFs had used, they were subordinated in GAA to a perspective of *involving* gays in *actions*.

The major mass actions of GAA have been the Intro 475 fight in New York City, the Albany demonstrations and the support given to the broader action coalition, the Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee.

The campaign around Intro 475 extended for about a year—from early 1971 to its latest defeat in January, 1972. This campaign by GAA involved mass leafletting of the gay community interventions in public hearings involving supporters from almost all sectors of society on a civil liberties basis, and reach out to the gay community with an agitational appeal for active support in numerous zaps and demonstrations called.

Intro 475 was defeated, but it will be introduced again.

In 1971 and again a couple of months ago, GAA supported marches in the state capitol of New York—Albany. These marches were initially called by the Tri-Cities Gay Liberation Front. These demonstrations drew about 1500 persons in 1971 and around 900 in 1972. These marches demanded the repeal of the sodomy laws, repeal of the loitering laws, repeal of the solicitation laws, repeal of the impersonation laws, enactment of fair employment legislation and non-discrimination in housing legislation.

In 1971 and 1972 the Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee (CSLDC) was a delegated body representing organizations which functioned as a steering committee in planning the marches, gay-ins and some of the other projects during the week of activities around Gay Pride Day. The CSLDC meetings in New York were of 30-50 persons from almost all the gay groups in New York and some from surrounding cities. Although GAA was the most active participant in the CSLDC, the lesbian groups played a more important role in this coalition than most joint activities in the past.

The initial demonstrations called in June 1969 in response to the police riot on Christopher Street were of around 500 to 1000 persons. By the next year the news of Christopher Street had spread to the entire country and around 6000 persons participated in the New York march. By 1971, Christopher Street marches, conferences, forums, and other activities were held in dozens of cities and campuses with more than 25,000 gays participating. From reports in *The Militant* and the gay press, the actions this year were smaller—totaling somewhere above 11,000. This is still significant considering the pressures of the election year and the effort to get gays off the streets and into the Democratic closet.

There are two important developments this year that deserve mention. First, actions occurred this year in areas where there were no public demonstrations before, e.g., Dallas and Atlanta.

Second, the Los Angeles demonstration was organized around four demands that are becoming an important political rallying point for gay activists in southern Cali-

fornia who want to continue mass street demonstration. These four demands as originally stated are: (1) End legislation of sexuality between consenting persons; (2) End police harassment; (3) Release all persons held in prisons or mental hospitals convicted of victimless crime; (4) End job discrimination. These demands could have been formulated better. For example, the first demand could be formulated, "Abolish the Sodomy and Solicitation Laws." The important point is not their formulation—but rather that the development is important as this is—but rather that the development is that the nationally coordinated demonstrations are moving in the direction of taking on a political focus. More on this later.

### *The Lesbian Feminist Organizations*

The Daughters of Bilitis are continuing to be the major national organization of lesbians. In 1965 a convention of DOB passed a "decentralization" resolution abolishing the national officers and making each chapter completely autonomous. In some areas DOB remains the central organized lesbian group—as in New York City and San Francisco.

DOB is one of the most heterogeneous of the gay organizations at this point with most women relating to it on one of several levels. First and foremost, as a social center for women who are in the closet. Second, some women participate in reformist efforts toward legal reform in areas such as child custody. Third, the younger women who have a "livingroom feminist," counterculture perspective.

The important development in the growth of the lesbian movement is the emergence of the lesbian feminist groups. These groups are very small and still developing. In Los Angeles, however, the Lesbian-Feminists lead all the lesbian groups politically through the Lesbian Coalition. These groups have the clearest perspective of building a mass gay liberation movement and are taking the lead in building the gay antiwar participation and are by far the healthiest in terms of orientation in the election period.

It was the Lesbian-Feminists that led the fight in the Los Angeles Christopher Street demonstration meeting for the advancement of the four demands as the political basis for the march.

Another example of the significance in this development can be seen from the clarity of the Yellow Springs Radical Lesbians-GLF document inserted in the *Discussion Bulletin*, Vol. 30, No. 1, by Lee Smith.

### *The Gay Movement in the Election Period*

There are three main sectors of the gay movement at this point grouping around different issues and tactics.

First is the reformist and generally conservative wing which is led by organizations such as the Society for Individual Rights in San Francisco, the Mattachine Society, the Metropolitan Community Church, the Daughters of Bilitis and the organizations of the gay gay-bar owners.

These groups support abolition of the sodomy laws as they now exist but propose legalization only between "consenting adults"; they do not challenge the laws abridging the right of adolescents to a sexually free life. On the other hand gay liberation organizations raise the demand for abolition of the laws between "consenting persons."

These groups have only engaged in lobbying efforts (usually under the NACHO banner) to obtain civil rights and have opposed any perspective for mass action. Other



demonstrations, when pressured by younger gay liberation  
are: (1) ~~Organizations~~, have these groups supported actions such as  
persons; ~~the~~ Albany demonstrations, zaps of various politicians,  
persons held ~~in~~ the Christopher Street actions.

timeless crime. The leaderships of these organizations have become  
nds could ~~move~~ in supporting liberal Democrats on the local level  
demand ~~conventionally~~ for McGovern.

d Solicitate the gay liberation organizations such as GAAs and  
mulation—~~and~~ other organizations have also been drawn into the  
development—~~Democratic~~ Party through the "minority representation."  
s are moving ~~in~~ February, in Chicago, a national gay conference

More on ~~the~~ held as a "National Gay Political Strategy Conference"  
formed the National Coalition of Gay Organiza-  
tion (NCGO). This conference was briefly reported in

~~The~~ *Albion*. NCGO was initially conceived of as becoming  
be the major ~~the~~ national gay political caucus, but its actual  
a convention ~~development~~ has been very uneven throughout the country.  
n abolishing ~~the~~ conference passed an extensive "Bill of Gay Rights"  
r completed ~~it~~ is formulated quite well. (A copy is appended.)  
the central ~~the~~ main work of NCGO has been carried out in  
ity and ~~Saturday~~ of regional conferences held throughout the  
country. In some places, NCGO is essentially a "Gays  
gay organization," but in most places its nature is much  
to it on ~~one~~ defined.

al center for ~~the~~ major project oriented toward the Democratic Party  
men participation in Miami was to get gays to the convention  
m in areas ~~demonstrate~~. They had only minimum success in the  
women ~~when~~ of the organizers.

perspective ~~that~~ McGovern is retreating on the gay rights  
the lesbian ~~these~~ activities will have to search for some other  
ist groups ~~perspective~~ if they are to continue NCGO. With the shame-  
veloping. ~~the~~ exist attacks by McGovern people against the gay  
lead all ~~the~~ plank, large numbers of NCGO affiliated people  
Coalition ~~left~~ at a crossroads. They are exploding in fury now,  
of building ~~later~~ there will no doubt be "private assurances" that  
g the lead ~~McGovern~~ "privately" supports gay rights.

are by far ~~some~~ healthy mass-action tendencies have emerged from  
on periodic ~~southern~~ California conferences of NCGO. The or-  
ght in the ~~izers~~ of the Christopher Street actions in Los Angeles,  
meetings ~~initially~~ the Lesbian-Feminists, went to the recent confer-  
e politicians ~~held~~ in Bakersfield on July 1-2 and have called for  
national demonstrations around the four demands in  
development ~~Los Angeles~~ on October 7. Initial planning meetings have  
ngs ~~Radio~~ ~~ready~~ taken place.  
discussion

### *The Democratic "Hopefuls"*

An example of the drawing of gay activists into the  
Democratic Party is an article run in the July 5 *Advocate*  
ement ~~and~~ the banner headline, "Minnesota Dems Adopt Gay  
l tactics ~~works~~." The article said, "Rochester, Minn.—The Min-  
ive wing ~~of the~~ Democratic-Farmer-Labor convention adopted a  
y for ~~incorporating~~ gay-rights platform June 11 and elected a young  
Society ~~gay~~ activist as an alternate to the Democratic National  
htrs ~~of the~~ convention in Miami. . . . The platform which calls for  
owners ~~presenting~~-adults sex legislation and legal same-sex mar-  
laws ~~as~~ ~~ages~~, was adopted exactly as drafted by the DFL Gay  
between ~~Democrats~~ Caucus. . . ."

abridge. Obviously, only the smallest concessions were made  
life. On—~~and~~ these only on paper. But these same actions have  
aise ~~the~~ occurred in the state caucuses of California, New York,  
presenting ~~Oregon~~ and other states.

In Miami, the gay rights plank was defeated 54-34  
efforts ~~in~~ the platform committee. But this has told gays that  
l rights ~~if~~ they would work a little harder in the Democratic Party  
a. Only ~~they~~ might win next time.

The major candidates, such as Humphrey, Lindsey  
and McGovern all had "no comment" positions on the  
gay rights question at the start of their campaigns. Mc-  
Govern said that it was a state's responsibility and totally  
within their domain. But as the gay activists organized  
and confronted these candidates throughout the country,  
the candidates were forced to adapt to the pressures from  
the gay movement.

On June 1, 1972, Hubert Humphrey was interviewed  
on the CBS-owned television station KNXT in Los Angeles  
on the 3 PM "Newsmakers" program. The interviewer  
asked, "How do you stand on liberalization of the laws  
regarding homosexuality?" HHH's reply was, "Well, I  
must confess that I believe they (gays) have a case. That  
civil liberties and equal protection of the laws applies  
equally to all walks of life, to all social habits [sic]. So  
I would be sympathetic to a degree of liberalization. . . ."

The interviewer continued, "Would you eliminate homo-  
sexuals from federal employment?"

HHH replied, "Well, it would be depending upon whether  
or not . . . the degree of sensitivity of the job [sic]. . . .  
Because regrettably in this world of ours there are a num-  
ber of people that feel that homosexuality can be used  
as a way of blackmail upon certain individuals. But  
homosexuality as a roadblock to just normal civil service  
and normal employment within the government, I think  
isn't beyond what I would call protection of civil liberties."

"Is it a crime?" asked the interviewer.

"Well, it's a crime if the state law says so. You can  
change the law. What's a crime is what the law says  
(*Advocate*, July 5)."

Remember, this is a capitalist politician still running  
for the nomination of the Democratic Party being inter-  
viewed over TV. What is remarkable is the manner in  
which he was attempting to straddle the fence to appeal  
to gay voters yet not completely outrage the bigots. HHH's  
position says a lot about what he considers the mood  
of the country to be and, more importantly, the social  
weight of gays.

But McGovern was to outdo HHH in this area. A "Gay  
Citizens for McGovern" committee has been formed and  
a big ad campaign begun in West Coast gay publications.  
A printed folded leaflet position paper from McGovern's  
national campaign office has been distributed by the thou-  
sands at gay bars and at meetings of gay organizations.

McGovern issued a six-point program for gay rights  
that is printed under the title, "Has Anybody Else Spoken  
Up For You Lately?" The program covers items such  
as elimination of discrimination within Federal employ-  
ment, an end to dishonorable military discharges, and  
end to tax discrimination against single persons living  
together and an end to the ban against homosexuals  
from immigrating into the United States. McGovern fails  
to mention the sodomy or solicitation laws. But even this  
modest position is being thrown overboard as McGov-  
ern moves to the right.

The Gay Rights Plank was defeated in the Platform  
Committee by a vote of 54 to 34, with the McGovern  
delegates voting *against* and the Wallace delegates voting  
*in favor*. (A copy of the Gay Rights plank is appended.)

The news of this is spreading throughout the gay lib-  
eration organizations and is disillusioning many young  
activists in the McGovern campaign. At the National Peace  
Action Coalition conference held in Los Angeles on July  
21-23, a motion was introduced in the gay men's work-



shop to condemn the McGovern campaign and to call on all gays not to support him. All but one person in the 32 man workshop supported this motion. Only after it was remarked that the antiwar movement should remain nonpartisan and concentrate on antiwar activities did the discussion return to the fall action proposals.

#### *Proposed Guidelines for Party Gay Work*

The key aspect of the party's orientation at this point should be to chip away at the gay support for McGovern and other liberal candidates and win the best of the gay activists to our campaign. There are two parts to this orientation. First, direct intervention with our national campaign, state races and local candidates in addition to our literary work in *The Militant*, *International Socialist Review* and literature. Second, build the mass actions of the gay movement that are objectively counterposed to the elections.

The party should aggressively intervene in all the gay conferences and organizations with our campaign around the idea that gays should "Vote SWP in '72—the Gay Liberation Campaign!" None of the capitalist candidates can match the party's record of supporting the Christopher Street demonstrations, the Albany actions, Intro 475, the Mike McConnell defense committee, and the gay contingents of NPAC and WONAAC. Besides this political support to these actions and contingents, we have helped to build many of these demonstrations.

The party's position on gay oppression and the gay movement passed at the last convention is unequivocal: *we are opposed to all forms of oppression and discrimination in this society.*

An example of the interventions possible is the NCGO national convention scheduled for Minneapolis on Labor Day weekend, and all of the regional conferences. The campaign should be there denouncing McGovern and fighting against any continued support to his campaign because of his "private" support for gay rights, his stand on the war, etc. Our intervention in these kinds of conferences should also include support for the antiwar and women's liberation activities and support to gay mass demonstrations around the key democratic demands emerging from the gay movement. These key demands are:

- 1) Repeal the sodomy and solicitation laws;
- 2) Amnesty for gays in prison or hospitals convicted of victimless crimes;
- 3) End police harassment;
- 4) End job discrimination.

The call for demonstrations on October 7 should not only be supported by the party, but we should help initiate meetings and coalitions to build these massive non-exclusionary actions in every city possible. These actions, coming before the elections, are objectively counterposed to the elections and help break away activists from the perspective that the only thing they can do in the next period is to work on the SWP election campaign or McGovern's campaign. As I pointed out there is already a great deal of hostility to McGovern developing and the forces are available among the younger gay liberation organizations to assemble coalitions around these mass actions.

Where we have the comrades available, it would be particularly helpful and advantageous to run up-front gay comrades for Congress or for local office. This helps

explain there is no contradiction in supporting our campaign and building a mass movement. Our campaign is an important weapon, as in all the mass movements in keeping as many activists as possible independent and in the streets during the election period.

Educational work is still of critical importance to the gay movement. This is important in winning gays to the perspective of coming out and joining the gay liberation movement and being politically active in the other mass movements, perhaps for the first time. Also, educational work plays an important part in winning allies to the gay movement from the straight sector of society. Campus groups and coalitions should be encouraged to hold educational classes and conferences that discuss the origins of gay oppression, the situation of gays in relation to the current radicalization and the history of the gay movement. We should be there to draw the conclusions that only a socialist revolution opens up the possibility of a just, free human society without the oppression of gays.

Struggles around democratic rights will continue to be a key area for the gay movement. There will be attempts to keep the gay organizations off campus as in the past and to throw the already campus registered organizations off campus. Cases of police harassment and victimization will arise. Gays will be discriminated against on the job or denied jobs. Illegal vigilante terrorism will continue to be directed against gays. Only our movement has the concepts of a broad single-issue civil liberties defense committee. Our movement can play a critical role in educating the gay activists on this perspective and strategy in defense work and we can help launch defense committees in response to some specific situation. The work done by the comrades in Minneapolis around the Mike McConnell defense committee is a good example of the work that can be done in this area.

It will be necessary that comrades, particularly those on campus, work within the gay liberation organizations and carry out these perspectives. We want to be known as a part of the leadership of the gay movement and be known as the best builders of the mass action coalitions and the gay contingents.

There may be the forces available for a national campaign to repeal the sodomy and solicitation laws or to extend the civil rights acts to forbid discrimination based on sexual orientation. However, we cannot judge that until we are members of the gay organizations and have a better feel for the movement. We should have this perspective and allow the Political Committee to launch this campaign at any appropriate time. However, this can be done only after the party has settled the basic questions of orientation and intervention.

#### *In Summary*

The object of the history of the gay movement is to give comrades a feel for the actual development of the gay movement as a real movement which is part of the current radicalization. This is also the reason why the extensive appendix is attached with so many documents of the gay movement.

The objective of these guidelines is to lay out a perspective for party intervention in the gay liberation movement that would bring the party closer to its goal—that of becoming the mass revolutionary party with the political hegemony needed to lead the masses of radicalizing Americans to a successful transformation of society. T



an immediate end to all oppression of homosexuals  
the immediate recognition of these basic rights:  
**THE RIGHT TO OUR OWN FEELINGS.** This is the  
to feel attracted to the beauty of members of our  
sex and to embrace these feelings as truly our own,  
from any question or challenge whatsoever by any  
person, institution or "moral authority."  
**THE RIGHT TO LOVE.** This is the right to express our  
feelings in action, the right to make love with anyone, any  
time, provided only that the action be freely  
chosen by all the persons concerned.  
**THE RIGHT TO OUR OWN BODIES.** This is the right  
to use and express our bodies as we will, to nurture  
them, to display them, to embellish them, solely in the  
manner we ourselves determine, independent of any exter-  
nal control whatsoever.  
**THE RIGHT TO BE PERSONS.** This is the right to  
express our own individuality under the govern-  
ment of laws justly made and executed, and to be the  
beneficiaries of social and political rights which are guaranteed  
by the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of  
Rights, enjoined from all legislative bodies and courts,  
and grounded in the fact of our common humanity.  
To secure these rights, we hereby institute Houston Gay  
Liberation, which shall be completely and solely dedicated  
to their implementation and maintenance; repudiating at  
the same time violence (except for the right of self-defense)  
as unworthy of social protest; disdaining all ideologies,  
whether political or social; and forbearing alliance with  
any other organization except for those whose concrete  
actions are likewise so specifically dedicated.  
We finally to the imagination of oppressed homosexuals  
ourselves that we commend the consideration of these  
rights upon whose actions alone depends all the hope for  
the prospect of their lasting procurement.

#### WHAT IS GAY LIBERATION (August, 1971)

Gay Liberation is an activist homosexual civil rights  
organization. Membership is open to all persons who  
agree with the purpose of the organization and are pre-  
pared to work and devote time to their implementation.  
Gay Liberation is open to all varieties of homosexual  
orientation. No member may be discriminated against be-  
cause of personal appearance, style of behavior or sexual  
orientation. Gay Liberation has adopted this policy recognizing  
that prejudice against sub-minorities within the Gay com-  
munity is inconsistent with the struggle for fundamental  
human rights.

Gay Liberation avoids involvements in any program  
or action not obviously relevant to homosexual liberation.  
Although individual members of Gay Liberation are in-  
volved in many social causes, Gay Liberation has adopted  
the policy of being a one-issue organization which in-  
cludes a wide range of people having diverse social per-  
sonalities.

Gay Liberation is a loosely structured organization with  
branches and committees. Committee membership is open  
to any member interested in the particular goal of a spe-  
cific committee. All policy decisions are made by the gen-  
eral membership.

Gay Liberation is a political organization employing  
the tactics of orderly confrontation politics. Politicians  
and individuals in society who contribute to the oppres-

sion of homosexuals are publicly exposed through public  
confrontation, mass demonstrations and sit-ins. Gay Lib-  
eration has adopted this policy recognizing that an essen-  
tial aspect of the Gay Liberation is the development of  
an open sense of public identity in the Gay Community  
and a corresponding sense of responsibility on the part  
of the government. However, Gay Liberation does not  
endorse any candidate for public office or any political  
party. The response of politicians to Gay Liberation con-  
frontations is given the widest possible circulation in the  
straight and gay press, but the organization itself does  
not make any commitments to any one politician. Gay  
Liberation has adopted this policy to avoid compromising  
entanglements within the political system.

Gay Liberation is a cultural organization and recog-  
nizes that homosexuals are socially, educationally and  
culturally oppressed. Gay Liberation sponsors a variety  
of activities such as dances, consciousness-raising sessions,  
and small discussion groups to promote the unity and  
morale of the Gay community and to increase the mem-  
bers' awareness of their common oppression. Gay Lib-  
eration espouses the philosophy that known homosexuals  
have a right to live in and participate fully in the life  
of the community.

\* \* \*

#### RESOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL COALITION OF GAY ORGANIZATIONS

*[The following resolution was passed at the National  
Conference on Gay Political Strategy held in Chicago,  
February 11-13, 1972. The conference was attended by  
approximately 200 persons from 86 organizations from  
throughout the country. The conference was broadly recog-  
nized as a major conference of the entire gay liberation  
movement. Not only were all major tendencies of the  
gay movement represented, but Dr. Benjamin Spock at-  
tended and spoke as the People's Party presidential can-  
didate. Also, Mayor Lindsey sent a telegram to the con-  
ference presumably pledging active support for the "goals  
of this nation's gay community, both in New York City  
and in my campaign for the presidency (sic) (Advocate,  
March 15, 1972, page 1).]*

*[The following has been referred to as the "Bill of Gay  
Rights" and as the "Gay Rights Platform," and established  
the National Coalition of Gay Organizations. — M. M.]*

Millions of gay women and men in this country are sub-  
ject to severe social, economic, legal and psychological  
oppression because of their sexual orientation.

We affirm the right of all persons to define and express  
their own sensibility, emotionality and sexuality and to  
choose their own life-style, so long as they don't infringe  
upon the rights of others. We pledge an end to all social,  
economic and legal oppression of gay women and men.

We demand the repeal of all laws forbidding voluntary  
sex acts involving consenting persons in private.

Laws forbidding loitering for the purpose of soliciting  
for a homosexual liaison are vague and unconstitutional.  
Nevertheless, they are frequently used as the legal cover  
for police entrapment of gay women and men.

We demand the repeal of all laws prohibiting solicitation  
for a voluntary private liaison.



gain hegemony we must intervene in all the mass movements of this radicalization. Naturally, intervention in all the mass movements is a dialectical strategy of balanced work in the independent movements and work in the party's own name such as our election campaigns. Comrades must answer the question: What strategy and orienta-

tion vis-a-vis the gay liberation movement brings the party closer to our fundamental goal? I think that intervention in the radicalization as it develops, and as some comrades fantasize that it should be, will assure the eventual victory we are working for.

## APPENDIX

*[Five documents are reprinted here for the information of comrades that supplement the main body of my contribution. Where necessary I have added some additional comments of my own which appear in this bulletin in italics. — M. M.]*

### STATEMENTS BY HOUSTON GLF AND HOUSTON GL

*[The following are three documents from Houston gay liberation organizations. The first, "Houston Gay Liberation Front: Statement of Purpose and Demands," was originally formulated by gay activists at the Black Panther Peoples Revolutionary Constitutional Convention held in Philadelphia in 1969. All the GLFs tended to be based on a similar statement of purpose and demands. — M. M.]*

#### HOUSTON GAY LIBERATION FRONT: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE & DEMANDS (Fall, 1970)

We, the brothers and sisters of the Houston Gay Liberation Front, declare ourselves a political group. We are liberating ourselves from oppression and suppression, both that which comes from within ourselves and that which comes from oppressive social forces. We are gay. Getting our heads together. Loving one another. We will be free.

In order to achieve this we require:

1. The right to be gay anytime, anyplace.
2. The right to free physiological change and modification of sex upon demand.
3. The right to free dress and adornment.
4. That all modes of human sexual self-expression between consenting individuals deserve protection of the law and social sanction.
5. The right of every child to develop in a non-sexist, non-possessive atmosphere, which is the responsibility of all people to create.
6. That a free educational system present the entire range of human sexuality, without advocacy of any one form or style; that no sexist rules and sex-determined skills be fostered by the schools.
7. That the language be modified so that no gender take priority.
8. That the judicial system be run by the people through people's courts. That all persons being tried be tried by a representation of their peer group.
9. That gays be represented in all governmental and community institutions.
10. That organized religions be condemned for aiding in the genocide of gay people and enjoined from teaching hatred and superstition.

11. That psychiatry and psychology be enjoined from advocating a preference for any form of sexuality, and the enforcement of that preference by shock treatment, brainwashing, imprisonment, etc.
12. The abolition of the nuclear family because it perpetuates the false categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality.
13. The immediate release of and reparations for gay and other political prisoners from prisons and mental institutions. The support by gay political prisoners of all other political prisoners.
14. That gays determine the destiny of their own communities.
15. That all people, regardless of sex or sexual orientation, share the labor and products of society.
16. That technology be used to liberate all people of the world from drudgery.
17. An immediate end to military oppression both home and abroad.
18. An immediate end to all police harassment and brutality.
19. The full participation and support of gays in the people's revolution.
20. Finally, an end to domination of one person by another.

*[After a number of months a transformation occurred in Houston GLF that paralleled the splits in New York and other cities that produced New York GAA and similar groups. In August 1971 the following two documents were prepared by part of the original leadership of GLF and submitted to Houston GL as it was now called. The group dropped the "Front" as part of an attempt to avoid the ultraleftism that went along with the GLF activities and structure. The following two statements are patterned after statements by NY GAA. — M. M.]*

#### HOUSTON GAY LIBERATION: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE (August, 1971)

WE AS LIBERATED GAY ACTIVISTS demand freedom for the expression of our dignity and value as human beings through confrontation with and disarmament of all mechanisms which unjustly inhibit us; social, economic and political. Before the public conscience, we de-



... brings prejudice and myth have led to widespread discrimination against gay women and men.  
... demand the enactment of civil rights legislation which will assure prohibition of discrimination because of sexual orientation, employment, housing, public accommodations and public services.

#### DEMANDS:

##### Federal:

1. Amend all Federal Civil Rights Acts, other legislation and governmental controls to prohibit discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations and public services because of one's sexual orientation.
2. Issuance by the President of an executive order prohibiting the military from excluding persons who of their own volition desire entrance to the Armed Forces for reasons of their sexual orientation and from issuing less-than-honorable discharges for homosexuality and upgrading to full honorable of all such discharges for homosexuality previously issued with retroactive benefits.
3. Issuance by the President of an executive order prohibiting discrimination in the Federal Civil Service because of sexual orientation in hiring and promoting; and prohibiting discrimination against gay women and men in security clearances.
4. Elimination of tax inequities victimizing single persons and same-sex couples.
5. Elimination of bars to the entry, immigration and naturalization of homosexual aliens.
6. Federal encouragement and support for sex education courses prepared and taught by qualified gay women and men, presenting homosexuality as a valid, healthy preference and life-style and as a viable alternative to heterosexuality.
7. Appropriate executive orders, regulations, and legislation banning the compiling, maintenance, and dissemination of the information on individual sexual preferences, behavior and social and political activities for dossiers and data banks and ordering the immediate destruction of all such existing data.
8. Federal funding of aid projects by gay women's and men's organizations designed to alleviate the problems encountered by gay women and men which are engendered by an oppressive sexist society.
9. Immediate release of all gay women and men now incarcerated in detention centers, prisons and mental institutions, because of sexual offenses relating to victimless crimes or their sexual orientation and that adequate compensation be made for the mental and physical duress encountered and that all existing records relating to the incarceration be immediately expunged.

##### State:

1. All federal legislation and programs enumerated in demands 1, 6, 7, 8, and 9 above should be implemented at the state level where applicable.
2. Repeal of all state laws prohibiting private sexual acts involving consenting persons' equalization for homosexuals and heterosexuals of the enforcement of all laws.
3. Repeal all state laws prohibiting solicitation for private

vate voluntary sexual liaisons and those laws prohibiting prostitution, both male and female.

4. Enactment of legislation prohibiting insurance companies and any other state-regulated companies and any other state-regulated enterprises from discriminating because of sexual orientation in insurance and in bonding or any other control of one's personal demeanor.

5. Enactment of legislation so that child custody, adoption, visitation rights, foster parenting and the like shall not be denied because of sexual orientation or marital status.

6. Repeal of all laws oppressing transvestism and cross-dressing.

7. Repeal of all laws governing the age of sexual consent.

8. Repeal of all legislative provisions that restrict the sex or number of persons that enter into a unit of marriage, and the extension of all legal benefits to all persons who cohabit regardless of sex or number.

\* \* \*

#### DEMOCRATIC PARTY GAY RIGHTS PLANK

*[The following is the text of the Gay Rights Plank as submitted to and rejected by the Platform Committee of the Democratic Party at its 1972 Miami convention. It was then submitted to the convention as a whole as a minority report. — M. M.]*

Millions of gay women and men in this country are subject to severe social, economic, and legal oppression because of their sexual orientation.

We affirm the right of all persons to define and express their own sensibility, emotionally, and sexuality, and to choose their own life-style, so long as they do not infringe on the rights of others.

The new Democratic Administration will:

1. Urge the repeal of all laws, federal and state, regarding voluntary sex acts involving consenting persons in private, laws requiring attire, and laws used as a shield for police harassment.

2. Enact civil rights legislation which will prohibit discrimination because of sexual orientation in employment, housing, public accommodations, and public services.

3. Eliminate sexual orientation or preference as a criterion for employment by all public and governmental agencies, in work under Federal contract, for service in the United States Armed Services, and for licensing in government-regulated occupations and professions.

4. Eliminate sexual orientation as a criterion for obtaining or retaining loans, insurance and bonding.

5. Eliminate sexual orientation as a criterion for immigration to the United States.

6. Upgrade to honorable all less-than-honorable military discharges previously given solely because of sexual relations between consenting persons or because of allegations relating to sexual orientation.

7. Seek the release of all persons incarcerated in prisons and mental institutions for victimless sex acts.

July 31, 1972